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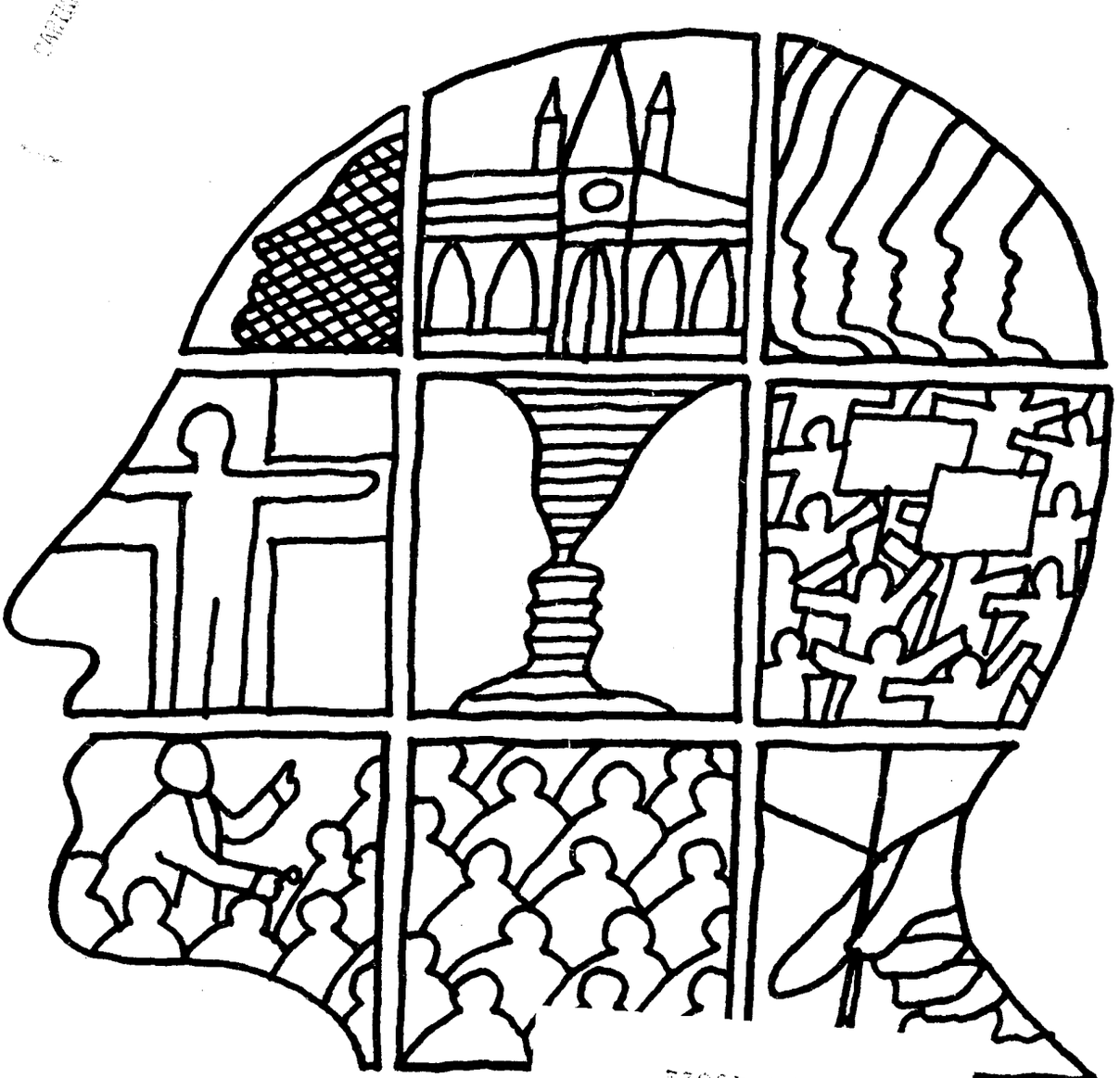

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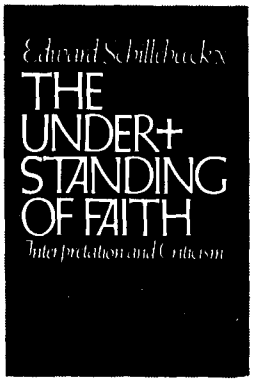

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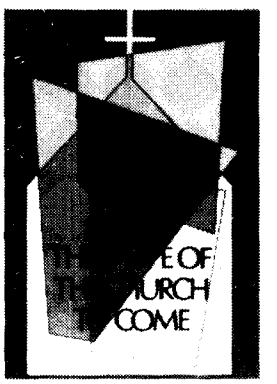

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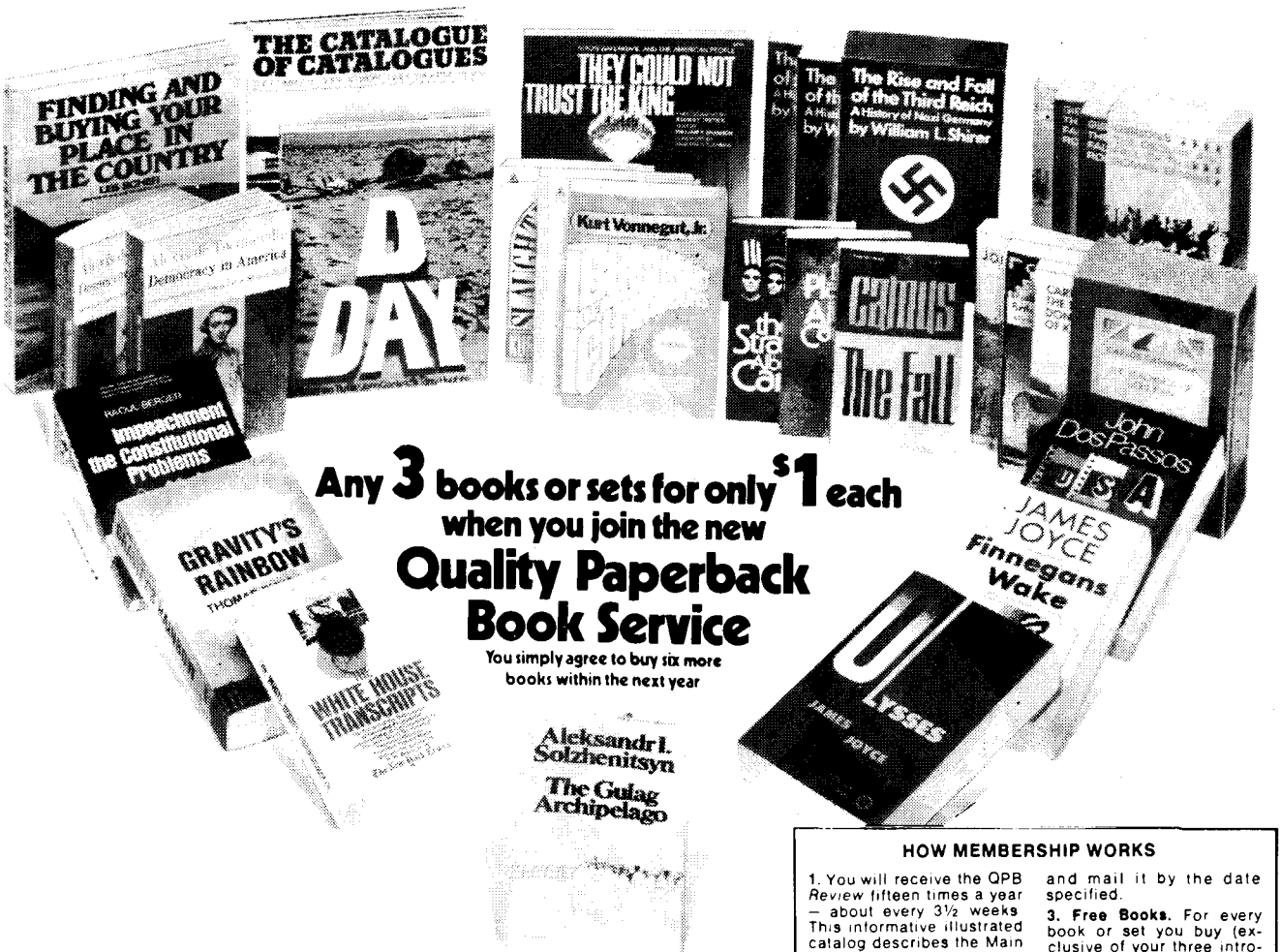

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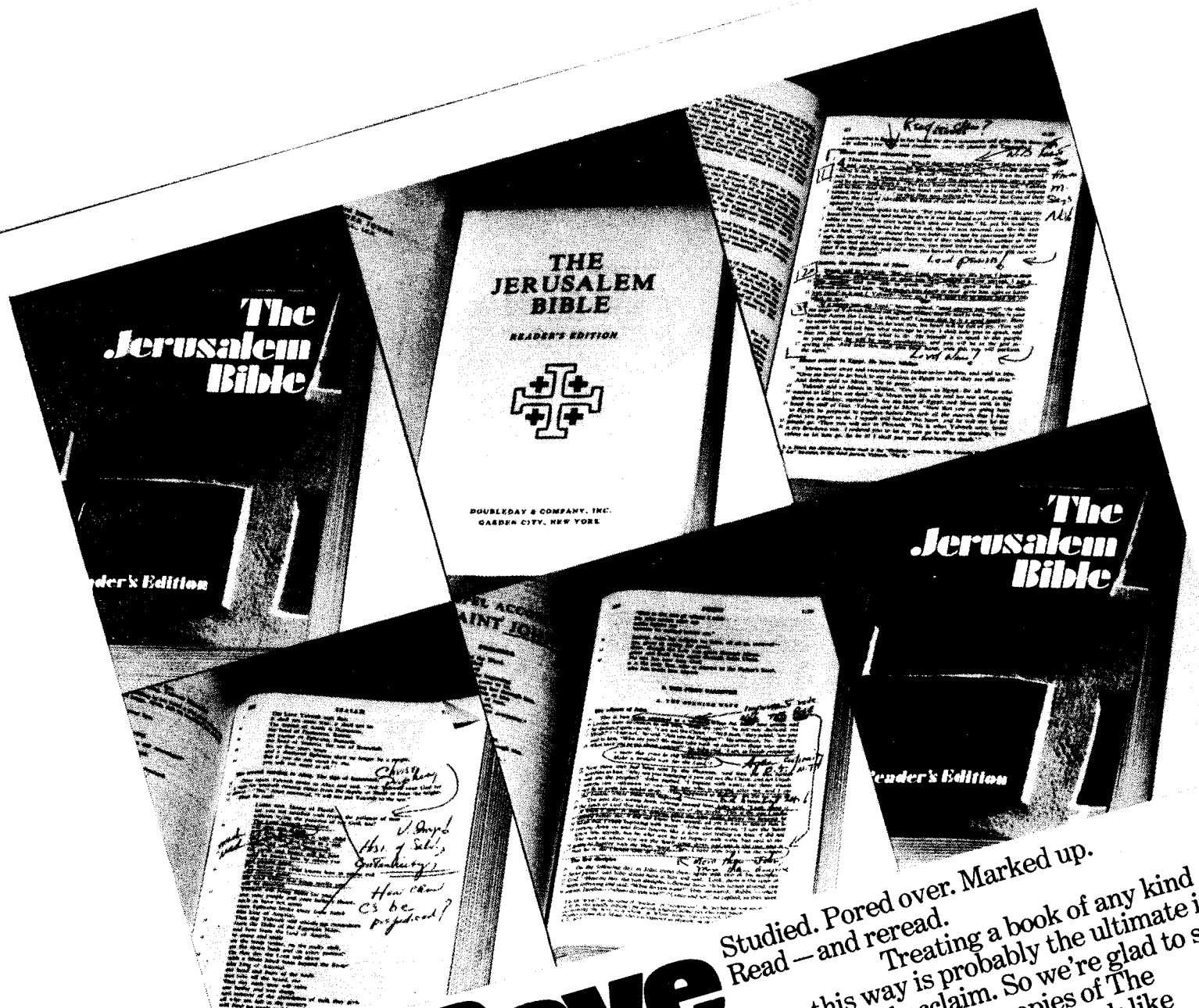

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COMMONWEAL'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Fifty years ago, on Nov. 12, 1924, the first issue of *Commonweal* was published. Why another magazine? Wrote the editors: "The difference between the *Commonweal* and other weekly literary reviews designed for general circulation is that the *Commonweal* will be definitely Christian in its presentation of orthodox religious principles and their application to the subjects that fall within its purview. . . . As a sure background the *Commonweal* will have the continuous, unbroken tradition and teachings of the historic Mother Church. But it will be in no sense—nor could it possibly assert itself to be —an authoritative or authorized mouthpiece of the Catholic Church. It will be the independent, personal product of its editors and contributors, who, for the most part, will be laymen."

With that statement of purpose as its charter, *Commonweal* began publication. Over the years since then, there have been many attempts at self-evaluation and self-explanation; the surprising thing about these is not their differences but their similarities. Emphasis has naturally shifted from time to time during 50 years, as new problems arose and new situations developed. Nonetheless, certain characteristics have remained rather constant. One effort at self-analysis summed up: "The purpose of the men who founded the *Commonweal* in 1924 was to provide a new expression of Catholicism in American life" (a new expression, it should be noted, in which, then as now, good writing and good thinking were welcome whether from Catholic or non-Catholic sources). Not all readers nor even all editors, however, have agreed on what "a new expression of Catholicism in American life" should mean in practice. Earlier editors spoke of the "changeless truths of Catholicism," which they called the "foundation and ultimate test of everything the magazine believes." Many readers over the last 50 years would have cheered the magazine if it had in fact restricted itself to restating these "changeless principles" in new language. It was when the magazine tried to apply the principles to such issues as the race question, anti-Semitism, nationalism, peace or war, that the cancellations came in. Many who objected to controversial editorial positions insisted that later editors had abandoned the lofty plateau on which they claimed the magazine was founded. Yet it was founding editor Michael Williams who described the magazine's beginnings in terms of "some sort of publication that would serve as a medium for the expression of Catholicism in its varied and frequently highly debatable possibilities of application to contemporary social problems." Similarly, early and long-time managing editor George N. Shuster said one of the main ideas of the early days was to establish a lay organ which would implement the then-radical and far-reaching social message of the Bishops' Statement of 1919, written by the pioneering Msgr. John A. Ryan.

Over the years, then, there have been many who objected to the magazine's comments on specific secular issues, from Franco and Father Coughlin through Senator Joe McCarthy to Watergate and Vietnam. In more recent times, however, the trend has shifted in the other direction. The magazine's concern with the great political and social questions of the day is more or less accepted, if frequently not really welcomed; what is resented more particularly is the concern of the editors with internal Church problems. It is accepted that *Commonweal* speaks to the world in the accents of the Church; what is rejected is that it speaks to the Church in the accents of the world—when the magazine insisted before Vatican II, for example, that the Church had much to learn from democratic society, that concepts like due process of law would improve ecclesiastical life, that democratic society came closer to the Gospel ideal than any authoritarian regime. In earlier years there had been a strong

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tendency in the Catholic community to leave ecclesiastical and theological questions to clerics and religious; *Commonweal* itself long stressed the fact that the temporal was the specific sphere of the layman. In recent years, however, and especially since Vatican II, there has been a growing conviction that such questions concern the entire Christian community and indeed that they are too important to be left solely to "official" spokesmen. This is a conviction we share.

When the present editors go back 50 years to read the statements of purpose by the magazine's founding fathers, we are struck by one significant change: the great shift that has taken place in ecclesiology in that time. Fifty years ago the prevailing concept of the Church —and this certainly was not limited to the editors of *Commonweal*—tended to be highly static. The Church was seen as the Rock, as the timeless custodian of unchanging truths, the clearing-house for immutable principles which implicitly contained the answers to all problems. The task of the Christian citizen or journalist, then, was clear—all he had to do was to go to the right file-drawer and apply the proper principle to the specific current problem. This static concept of the Church is now dead; it was dying before Vatican II, and the Council Fathers laid it to rest once and for all. Today the predominant concept, indeed the popular cliché, is of the pilgrim Church, the Church on the move, seeking the right path, not supplying easy answers but perhaps asking the right questions—a Church perpetually in need of self-examination and self-renewal. Yet there are clearly many Catholics who still yearn for the old certainties; they do not accept the new ecclesiology and they resent any suggestion that the Church does not necessarily have the answer to every conceivable question.

A case can be made that our predecessors in 1924 were influenced in matters secular and religious by the euphoria surrounding the then newly elected Calvin Coolidge. No such euphoria, secular or religious, exists today. In this connection it is interesting to look at another bishops' statement, this one the recent review of trends issued by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Significantly, the bishops start right out by saying: "The word 'malaise' is often used to describe the current state of U.S. society in general and, in particular, the condition of religion in the United States." In recent years, the bishops note, it has been customary to discuss the tensions within the Catholic Church in the U.S. in terms of conflict between conservatives and liberals. Now, they say: "It may be, however, that the time has come to cast such discussions in different terms. The emerging question for the Catholic community in the United States may well be whether it will in the future, as in the past, derive its fundamental beliefs and attitudes from the traditional value system of Catholic Christianity, or whether its beliefs and attitudes will be drawn more and more from the secularistic, humanistic value system of the society around it."

Commonweal, of course, has long been known as a liberal magazine, and perhaps because our bruises are too recent, we cannot totally agree with the bishops that the day of liberal-conservative battle is completely gone. But we do agree, and have long held, that this difference, although very important, is not the central issue.

The Church had something to learn from Paul Blanshard and other nativist critics, despite their distortions; only the vindication of John Courtney Murray at Vatican II gave final answer to their charges about official Catholic lack of commitment to the democratic state. But if it was true that certain ecclesiastics were slow in seeming to accept some of the theories behind democratic society, there was nonetheless something ironic about the nativist attack: the truth has always been that the American Catholic community at large—including the American bishops—was not less American than it should have been but was entirely too uncritically American, not simply welcoming the obvious values of the American system but abandoning Christian judgment on a multitude of crucial issues, from the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few to the race question, from the Spanish-American war to Vietnam. The bishops are certainly right: to an increasing extent the question in the future will be how far Christian principles will have any influence on "secular" issues or even on the thinking of individual American Catholic citizens on such questions. Is the parable of the Good Samaritan to become a question of purely personal charity and irrelevant to public policy as millions face starvation in India, Asia and Africa? In a world of proliferating nuclear weapons, is the traditional Christian moral heritage on war and violence to be completely forgotten? Indeed, going beyond specific questions of public policy like these, will Catholics and all Christians face up to what is clearly a crucial issue in our time, the general crisis of faith described by the contributors to this special issue?

We live in a world and in a Church that are changing at a mad pace—indeed, in the next decade both the United States and American Catholicism may face the greatest challenges either has ever seen. In such an era, it is the conviction of the editors that a magazine like *Commonweal* still has much to say—a conviction illustrated by our publishing this special Commonweal Paper on Faith to mark the completion of 50 years of publication. Over this past five decades the magazine has survived only because of the loyal support of its subscribers and contributors and the generous assistance provided by friends such as the Commonweal Associates. Convinced as the editors are of the value of the magazine and its unique role for the years ahead, in the ultimate analysis the future of *Commonweal* depends on the continuation of that loyalty and support from its friends and subscribers.

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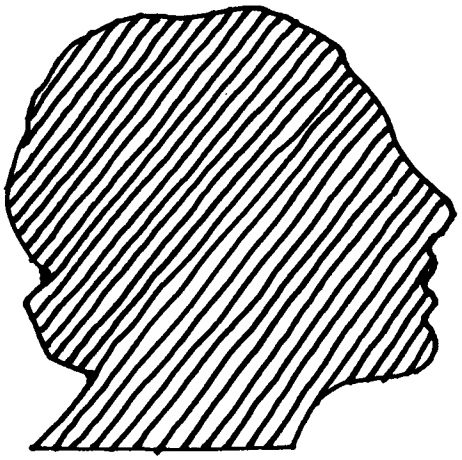

THE DIFFICULTY OF MAKING FIRE

DAVID S. TOOLAN

Let us begin with a children's story. Once upon a time, there was a man who meditated on the ways in which nature operates, and he discovered, due to his concentration and application, how fire could be made. This man was called Nour. He decided to journey from one tribe to another, sharing the art of his discovery with different peoples. Some took his instruction and learned how to make fire themselves. Others, however, drove him away, thinking him a menace, before they had time to understand the value of his discovery. Finally, one tribe before which he demonstrated his art panicked and killed him, being certain he was a demon. End of part one of our tale. Part two takes up the drama many centuries later.

The first tribe which had learned about fire reserved the secret for their priests, who enjoyed affluence and power while the people froze. The second tribe forgot the art and instead worshiped the instruments of making fire (perhaps *ex opere operato*). The third worshiped a likeness of Nour himself, but were no better off than the second tribe, having forgotten how to do what their teacher went about doing. The fourth tribe, being people of the Book, retained the story of fire-making in their legends, but again, though the story was reiterated, it rarely expressed the actual life-story of the fourth tribe's members. The fifth tribe, on the other hand, actually did use fire, and this enabled them to be warmed in an otherwise cold climate, to cook their food and manufacture all kinds of useful articles. This tribe, however, was widely scattered among the nations, and its members were difficult to detect. Being cognizant of Nour's fate, moreover, they were inclined to reticence. For our purposes, we may end the fable here, though the original text goes on to unsettle the complacency of members of the fifth tribe with missionary aspirations, those who know the art of making fire but fail to master the additional art of teaching the method to those with different tongues and customs in a way that will not be triumphalistic.

We may, if we like, see the first part of this fable as telling the story of our founders, the Hebrew prophets, Socrates, and Jesus, and the second part telling the sequel, the somber history of forgetfulness and reminding in and out of synagogue, temple, civic forum and church. Fire-making, we might say, is the art of remembering ourselves when we have forgotten who the prophets, Socrates and Jesus told us we might become, when clouded by the cataract and callus of our individual and collective armaments races, we have lost our wits and our way. The prophets called attention to the injustice to which such witlessness leads, whereas for Socrates the capital crime lay in mindlessness parading as wisdom, and for Jesus the thing was its heartlessness. Depending on where we are, we need to hear one of these messages or the other, but as psychologists remind us today in chorus, listening is often difficult for adults.

Evil takes its toll. Even when we are genuinely welcomed into the world and assured by that primordial sacrament of our mother's milk and touch that the cosmos willingly gave us birth and holds promise for us, that sacrament does not hold. Mother's nerves, say, belie the faith she professes and Dad may be a commuter, absent even when present. The delicate ecology of our elemental trust that the universe stands as God found it on the seventh day, "very good," is disturbed, and so the anatomy of reactive neurosis begins early, and the urban rat-race does the rest—unless as adults we find another center of gravity which holds up in the bedlam we call our "world."

If I am not mistaken, that recentering was what our "founders" were about. Their disaffection for "the world" serves as an indictment of that adjustment process which compels a progressive shrinkage of head and heart, of condemning to death the greater part of our consciousness in the interests of succeeding at the competitive game and becoming in the event a soulless machine. The child in us, at first eager to drink in and absorb all the energy in the universe, gradually learns to seal up the avenues of access, fortify itself against loss and injury. When socialization in America does not mean conformity to the Vince Lombardi cult of winning ("the only thing"), we still find ourselves ruled by

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the clock, by production schedules, quantitative growth and individualistic success. The poet in us dies a little daily. We have time to master the world, little time to master the tumult of aborted selves that rage within for breathing space—and thus marginal time to expend on the evils of racism, violence, urban decay and world starvation. Our society is so structured that few find the time for enlightened self-interest, and if the time is there, the art of using it often is not.

Lacking an interior life, at the extreme we settle for those compensations of an empty heart—the insulated suburban pleasure dome and purchasing power for all the distractions needed to kill time before an antiseptic death. Having thus abandoned the *polis* to ITT and Chase Manhattan (or the Butcher of Attica), we then wonder why we are lonely and powerless—never recognizing that in an era of corporate socialism, the Lone Ranger is a jerk. The self-reliant ego, schooled not to depend on others, seals its own death-warrant. How, then, do we unlearn this grim "realism," and learn again to embrace the earth—and in the process release the stops on our own stymied imagination and creativity? It's a question of giving birth to oneself—a second birth. And of course, if we ever thought in the days of pre-Vatican II uniformity that there was one general answer to this question applicable to all, no such answer is possible today. Pluralism is our daily bread. We require different maieutics for different people.

Intent of the Sabbath

It was the intent, of course, of the Sabbath Rest—indeed of all religious ritual—to inspirit the dispirited and awaken sleepwalkers from their anesthesia. Involving both physical and mental exercise (that it be neither head-trip nor superstition), and indeed the employment of all the recreative arts, ritual and meditation disciplines were made for man, for people "all seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil." Without such arts, we lose the sense of what our moral strenuosity, our work, is for. Without what William James called "moral holiday," morality becomes self-righteous tyranny, charity merely officious meddling. Properly, worship should offer radical recreation for our arrested selves, "God's glory" being, as Irenaeus put it, "a man fully alive." But given the degeneration of formal religious rite in our culture and the lack of social consciousness in so much of revived spiritual exercise (privatized, as is the custom in Protestant America), our ritual and prayer often amounts to another narcotic which insulates us from the horror show of a consumer economy stimulating and feeding our insatiable needs even as it sucks blood from the world body politic.

In this respect, all Americans are somewhat in the position of our fable's priests who grow fat while the people freeze, the irony here being that it is *our* souls which are really "on ice." That liturgy does little to change us or alter our style of life may in part stem from a Catholic education that for so long made a sacred cow of verbal orthodoxy, and equally one-sidedly insisted on ritual observance (worshiping instruments)—while forgetting that both dogma and liturgy are roadmap and vehicle for a journey into experience which simplifies the self. The "Do this in memory of me" refers not to a rubric, the proprietary right of a clerical caste, but to a way of life that in our own situation and without slavish imitation we are all to embody. And at jeopardy if our Nour-precedent serves as example. Forgetting that, the church becomes a refuge for well-intentioned neurotics on permanent hold—and not a healing place for witless sinners. The remembering we require does not consist of cataloguing memorable archaic sagas, nor does it consist in following authorities like a dutiful robot. Children see through these charades—with their guts, which is where real reliables are always tested. No, we need a somatic process whereby we give flesh to good news—such as others can touch, as they did in a Pope John or a Gandhi. The point is to make fire yourself.

The problem is one of keeping faith—with ourselves, others and God—a problem not unlike the difficulty of making fire in our simple tale. Except that faith in the sense of profound self-remembering is no technological skill, at which we Americans excel, but concerns ourselves, the operators—and our interior economy. At issue here, then, are all those inward resources we draw or refuse to draw from the energy sources of the universe—a question of deep and lasting reserves without which the Gospel is a dead letter in a museum of antiquities. And here, on the issue of spiritual economies, we Americans are less skilled than in dealing with the oil shortage. And if we mistakenly look to the churches as still possessing a monopoly on the arts of inward transformation, our state seems even more bleak. The fact is that we need not look exclusively in that direction for assistance, for it is one of the distinctive marks of the modern age that the arts of tapping into deep spiritual reserves are no longer confined to church or its custodians, but widely distributed throughout our society and its institutions. The church is no longer sole repository. The disciplines of remembering and rebirth have indeed taken on "secular" form—and with the right attitude nearly anything will serve, from pottery and motorcycle maintenance to psychotherapy and Alinsky organizing. Once again, revival comes from unexpected quarters, and it should be no embarrassment to the church that her role as parenting agent here is now broadly distributed—for in consequence the scene of human possibility is not nearly so bleak as it otherwise would be.

The Spirit blows where She wills. A truly catholic sensibility ought to be able to discern inspiriting action

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wherever it occurs—and rejoice. No Gallup poll reports it, but people do come alive, repossess themselves, by a host of "unorthodox" means, and so assume the responsibility of caring for the earth and building a counter-culture that nurtures the growth of men and women who also may come into their own and keep faith with each other and a faithless world. As always, it is by their fruits, not their rhetoric or denomination, that we recognize them—these breathers of fresh promise into our stagnant world. And wherever they appear and by whatever mode or strange transport, their arrival is cause for eucharist—even at this 25th hour of terror.

Of course these faith-keepers must be distinguished from compulsive optimists who sustain their euphoria by evading tragedy and evil. Having food few of us know of, the authentic faith-keeper earns steadfastness only by passing through the heart of darkness, descending to meet the demons of fear and self-loathing within—whereas the magic optimist, lacking faith in his own depth-reserves, turns to lateral corroboration, to substitute parents, a police force armed to the teeth, or the security of mass-mindedness. The former has found another center of gravity than these—and what he or she may remind us of is that the prime sacrament of God's presence is, potentially, none other than you and me—us. Only note that if our legends are reliable, the God who is and acts in our life-stories is not a Promethean Zeus who hoards his fire and resents sharing it with earthlings, but one who recognizes no "mine" or "thine." More apposite for the moralistic Catholic conscience, the real God with whom we deal in all our dealings in the world is no coven of Furies, but the bearer of grace. Blasphemous as it may sound, God is a Commie, not a boring old emperor. If we can find our way past the fear of being ourselves, we may discover the fairy tales are true; we are all princes in beggar's clothing, sleeping beauties—waiting to be awakened to our identity. In this sense, it is not difficult to grasp that the problem is not that God may be dead, but we are—in failing to sense who we are. And that faithlessness, fundamentally a lack of faith in the power that is freely given us, naturally shows up in all we do, or omit.

Our inner world, or lack thereof, goes public. The family and city we build and manage expresses who we think we are, and consequently our lived religion (the metaphysic we feel in our gut) lies at the root of our politics. As a descriptive statement, it may be all too true that our religion in this sense has nothing to do with politics, but this admission simply exposes bankruptcy of spirit, not its riches. As Catholics who have succeeded in the long haul from immigrant ghetto to Babbitt's Main Street and beyond, it may not be far fetched to take the barren urban core of so many of our cities as an apt symbol of the steep human cost of our "success."

Has our climb to the top of the melting pot benumbed us, stifled our moral imagination, made us "good Germans" who hate breaches of etiquette more than injustice, who follow orders and swallow whole the mythology of the American Dream? Before Civil Rights battles, Vietnam and Watergate, this question was unthinkable—and habituated to the evasion of responsibility for our society's evils by our onetime minority status, it still is for many. Had we other securities than our credit-rating and a longer memory, we might be able to face the question, and indeed identify with the desperate in our own land and the sea of human despair in the rest of the world—all of which denies that the Kingdom will come. Could we look at that oppression squarely, I think, we would prove a national force less tolerant of "benign neglect" at home and of alliance with dictatorial oppression abroad.

No, it is no season for Cardinal Spellman's jingoism, but time to ask ourselves, as managers of the system now, how our individual and collective input contributes to the liberation of all peoples, a task that requires all our genius for technical invention and know-how surely, but equally demands we keep faith with the promise that is constantly being subverted in the global village. And at this point in the Catholic story in America, the broadside of the Hebrew prophets against the injustice of an affluent Israel will make healthier reading for us than the solace Paul and the New Testament writers were concerned to offer a harassed minority population in the Roman Empire. The latter may be what our "easy conscience" wants to hear, but it is not necessarily what our souls need to hear in order to choose life rather than death. If Vietnam and Watergate have not led us to reappraise where we stand, what we actually create (besides monsters) at home, in school, parish, business and civic arena, perhaps economic disaster will do the trick. The brink of despair may shake us out of our torpor, provided, that is, the shaking induces what the mystics referred to as the "purgative way," the first step in an opening to experiential reserves that ordinarily in prosperity we do not tap.

The reserves are there, we must learn to trust, as are the arts of breaking through our incredulity on the point, but neither is well advertised. The fifth tribe, as we pointed out, prefers anonymity, so it is necessary to play the detective in this matter. Further, as our fable suggests, neither legend-keeping nor Nour-worship by themselves are any guarantee of finding our way, though surely each contains clues to pursue. But there remains a serious problem if we are to put flesh on our legends and do what our teacher did, a conflict of detective methods that arises from a conflict in the largely hidden assumptions of divergent cultural styles. The point deserves elaboration.

As Americans, we speak of ours as an experimental, non-traditional society, and though there is much exaggeration in that (being more regimented in fact than our

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mythology would indicate), there is also plenty of truth in the description. But what are the consequences of this assertion for passing on a living tradition of promise (rather than formalism, moralism and empty ritual)? As Roman Catholics we profess loyalty to tradition, which is not to be confused with fixation on the past. The Roman way to ultimate self-transformation—which the stepchild American church has respectfully followed —we might simplify, is the way of faith classically articulated by Augustine, *credo ut intelligam.* It is what has been called the Way of Forms, the approach to perfection through the medium of crystallized wisdom—whose operational axiom is "Here is the truth: assimilate it!" Our destination is set forth in advance of taking the trip, hopefully as a map to guide our steps. In this approach, we are directed to trust *on faith* (and at second-hand) that the road map is reliable, and behave *as if* such and such an idea, feeling or action (exemplified, for instance, by Jesus) were our own until, by projecting ourselves into the model, we assimilate ourselves to it and find ourselves through it—our deepest reality confirmed by experience first-hand. The power of the map or symbol lies in its being a medium of integration rooted in our own deepest reality, and to appropriate the form or symbol is to remember ourselves and so be able to utter that paradox of St. Paul's, "not me, but Christ living in me."

This way is perfectly valid, even though subject to well-known risks. It invites head-tripping, killing moralism, and all the abuses of rigid authoritarianism—aberrations familiar to most Catholics. Worse, the Jesus-symbol often becomes a substitute rather than a vehicle for attuning us to the unfathomable mystery of our being—that we are each summoned to plumb the mystery and responsibility of being "of one substance with the Father." The Nicene creed was not meant to become the relic of a forgotten age, but a hymn to an archetypal story that each of us might sing about our own drama of virgin birth, creative suffering and continual resurrection. Instead, it is often exclusively *his* story, and that is the price of the church's amnesia on the point that the object was to make fire as he did. To the extent it remains his and not ours, we make the mistake of our Nour-worshipers. God does not become flesh in our time; we worship a plaster god, forgetting the secret of our humanity, mistrusting the Spirit in the actual present—and so our inward emptiness and powerlessness, our frustration and our violence.

Properly understood, the Augustinian way of faith still holds up, and yet it must be said that its style runs counter to another maieutic that increasingly seems to stamp our whole era. If the Way of Forms is Apollonian, this other approach is Dionysian, what we might call the Way of Expression. And today it sweeps through our culture like an invisible tidal wave—and seems to those raised in the traditionalist mode of the Way of Forms as a menacing invitation to anarchy. Its characteristic motto might be: "The truth lies within you, and you can find it by forgetting all packaged answers and established forms."

If I am not mistaken, all our psyches have been shaped by this momentous switch in cultural styles, but its revolutionary implications for church order and education in the art of faith-keeping have hardly been clearly recognized. For one thing, it means that much of our traditionalistic approach must continually battle against the expressive tidal wave—and with little understanding of disciplines that might ride the wave and use its power to good effect. Add to this the traumatizing abuses by which the Way of Forms has been subverted, and one obtains an explanation of why "tradition" induces in so many the possum effect.

The fact is that traditional maps and symbols represent for many a debased coinage whose currency provides little defense against the erosion of genuine community that constitutes the generative economy of real religious faith. When the language and forms lose their awakening power, become mere cliché or threat, they simply freeze gears, and instead of leading people to recall the authority latent in their lives, they have the inverse effect of invoking a rich association of entrapping traumas—and hanging them up there like the petrified possum playing dead. Thus the remarkable fact that many individuals can hear "good news" provided it is distinctly non-verbal (a sound sacramental instinct for what counts), or if words still count, hear it through psychological jargon, through Zen or perhaps the instructions of an Indian sorcerer—but to resort to the canonical language of the Gospel, much less official churchese, simply put them to sleep. A sound pastoral instinct would dictate that we cease beating our heads against the wall here, and seek other ways to move.

Learning to accept and use the Way of Expression would seem, then, to make sense. It need not be viewed as opposed to the objective to which our traditional Way of Forms aspired, as anyone can see who recalls that our prime teacher asserted "the truth lies within you," and our Apostle insisted that we are "Temples of the Spirit." The point is that though the two approaches begin from opposite poles, they may converge in the finale. The expressive way exhibits an iconoclasm toward all established forms and trusts that descent to those inner voices beneath all our egoistic posturing will dismantle the demons and liberate us for authentic responsibility. No less than the formal way, it can be a way to that "death to self" of which the Gospel speaks.

The fact is that both ways have their pitfalls, the expressive way in that it may only release deeply buried fixations which never wear themselves out, and the formal way in that the map may usurp the place of genuine experience and understanding—never encourag-

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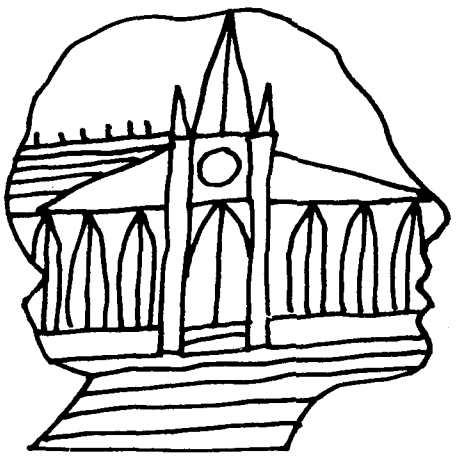
ing us to wrestle with our own angel for our own distinctive blessing. The advantages and dangers of the latter are of course more familiar to most of us, and so we cling to what we know, but the former approach is *de rigueur* in many Eastern anti-traditional traditions ("if you meet the Buddha, kill him!") which have evolved disciplines for making it a path to the highest spiritual transformation. There is no reason such disciplines cannot be adapted to fire-making in the Christian sense. That America is going Hindu or Buddhist (with the usual complement of frauds and romantic sentimentality) may just be one of the best things that ever happened to the Christian churches here. As anyone familiar with our nearly forgotten mystical tradition is aware, many of these Eastern ways are not indeed at all foreign to what was once a living force among us. In assimilating them, as the early Christian community did with Greek wisdom and Roman law, we may realize some of that catholicity we lay claim to. Of course, the church will itself be changed in form by the process, perhaps more radically than we now imagine. If that means more fire-makers, it will be a good thing.



Changing concepts

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND MODELS

PETER HEBBLETHWAITE

AT FIRST it looked as though the Church was merely being put in its place, in its proper place. If its claims were being scaled down, it was because they had been exaggerated; if it now seemed more modest, that was because it had been arrogant. In some such terms one could roughly summarize the Council's achievement in ecclesiology. The repentant future was to be different. Instead of the quasi-identification of the realized Kingdom with the Church—which led straight down the path of triumphalism—we were to stress its pilgrim and unfinished nature, always on the move; instead of the notion that the Church was a "perfect society," we admitted that it was sinful and perpetually in need of reform; and instead of contrasting Church and world, we were exhorted to share the hopes and joys of humanity. In other words, conciliar ecclesiology *relativized* the Church in a healthy manner. To say, or to imply, that the Church itself was the object of faith was blasphemy: it was the *milieu* of faith, its mediating community. The next decade was filled with the shock waves from these simple, fundamental and necessary options.

They banished a whole library full of once cherished apologetic arguments. It used to be claimed that Roman Catholics were more fortunate than others, not of course because of their merits, but because a complete system of grace-bearing sacraments accompanied them from the cradle to the grave as a kind of celestial social security. They were also alleged to be more fortunate because they "knew what they stood for," unlike (it must be assumed) other Christians who were still arguing about what to stand for. Péguy was brought in to emphasize the objective nature of belonging to the Church: "The bad citizen is of the city; the good stranger is not."

This miracle was worked, antecedent to choice, thanks to something called *ex opere operato*. You might stray far off or become a terrible sinner, but you remained a citizen and were still firmly held. A twitch on the thread of the Divine Angler could bring you back. You were marked, sealed, branded—all images legitimately derived from the *sphragis* or seal of the Spirit; but then this spiritual idea was juridicized to an extraordinary degree. *Where is your baptismal certificate?* At a stroke identity was tested and affirmed. Roman Catholics were urged to pride themselves on being different. Their subculture flowered, with many national nuances, as a means of expressing, adorning and making bearable the norms and values which made this group so special, privileged and different.

The conciliar ecclesiology put an end to these comfortable views, and it set up a movement which carried individuals and groups into novel and unforeseen areas. But the collapse of preconciliar ecclesiology did not mean simply its one-to-one replacement by another ecclesiology. For it were substituted several more or less

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articulate views of the Church, not always mutually consistent with each other, which reflected the aspirations of the age, impatience with what had gone before and the experience of Protestants. It speedily became apparent that "Church," far from being univocal, was a richly plastic notion, capable of being pushed this way or that and made to serve various purposes, some of them ideological. But ideological contamination would then have to be unmasked.

What people expected of the Church also began to change. Instead of being valued as a haven of security, the Church was praised for exhibiting signs of vigorous, if turbulent life. It was regarded as a source of inspiration for social or political commitment. It was said to be an area of freedom. Of course, as always happens in ecclesiology, there was a delicate interplay between the real and the ideal, and it was the highest hopes that were likely to be most cruelly dashed. That is why one of the most significant facts of the decade was that people began to use values learned from the Church as the yardstick by which to criticize it and find it wanting: human values, discovered in personal experience, were contrasted with the vast, unwieldy ponderousness of the impersonal institution. Moreover, it became fashionable in the late '60s *not to know*, and to compare the complacency of would-be certainties with the sincerity of inarticulacy. What had once been esteemed was now decried. Groping replaced definition. It was more creditable to stammer than to be eloquent.

In this new situation very little thought was given to the question of "membership" in the Church. The question was avoided partly because it could prove awkward or embarrassing, though late at night in Newman Centers students would ask: *"How much* do I have to believe in order to remain a Catholic with sincerity?" The question was often a prelude to tip-toeing away or discovering that integrity without faith was better than faith without integrity. Most pastors were sympahetic, and would seize the opportunity to try to redefine faith in terms of personal commitment rather than assent to a set of propositions. But they also tended to be as liberal as they could so as not to discourage anyone of good will, and one method was simply to broaden the boundaries. Rosemary Radford Ruether gave such perfect expression to this strategy that she must be quoted here: "One creates a larger boundary for that social reality called Roman Catholicism which can encompass those whom a narrow institutional definition would keep out"; and to make it quite clear why she was shifting the boundary, she went on: "In this way we can keep the creative work of many people within the cultural conversation which shapes the future" ("Continuing Reform after Vatican II," in *The Month*, March 1973, p. 96).

But can one so coolly shift the frontier, rather in the manner of peasants stealthily removing the boundary stones at night? Charles Davis thought not: he found himself unable to redefine the Roman Catholic Church in such a way as to count himself in. There was some truth in the remark that only those of a "conservative" bent "left" the Church, since they retained some regard for definition and clarity. On the other side, the boundary became so fuzzy and floating that one hardly knew whether it was being crossed or not. But concealed within this question of boundaries lay another, still graver, question: Is it enough for the individual or a group to declare that *this* is where they are going to place the frontier, and that they include themselves in saying *l'église, c'est nous*? Ms. Ruether has no doubt about her answer to this question, and it is a populist answer: "In a real sense . . . it is the bishops who become the excommunicated, while a thousand flowers bloom in the open fields around their fortresses. The people, not the bishops, define the social reality which they choose to call Roman Catholicism" (*ibid*). "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

Impasse

An *impasse* seems to have been reached. When this happens, it is usually because different people are arguing from different premises. In the end, the question of Church membership can only be answered in the light of the implicit image or model which is being used. Avery Dulles has usefully distinguished six models of the Church. We can consider them in turn and see how membership fares in each.

1) The "substantialist" position starts from the stable, unchanging, unyielding institution against which the waves of error lash in vain. The one true Church has four marks by which she can be recognized, and though other Christian groups may exhibit some Christian values, they do so only vestigially. The test of membership is conformity to clearly-held and firmly-defined doctrines, and it is the task of Church officials to see that they are maintained in their entirety, and that those who reject or adulterate the doctrines should, after due compassion has been shown, be excluded. On the substantialist model, it is clear who is in, and who out.

2) "Dualist" models make a distinction between, on the one hand, the Church as we know it on earth, the concrete community of believers, and the invisible Church which alone is held to be the *real Church*. Membership, therefore, is by aspiration and self-description, since no Church official is competent to decide whether you qualify. In theory I could secretly belong to this invisible Church in the silence of my heart. On the whole, this is not a model much used by Roman Catholics, since they tend to have an incarnational sense that the real Church cannot be placed somewhere else in a dream-like world. The real Church, wherever it is, is the Church that sweats.

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However, there is a Catholic version of this model, to which Heinrich Böll recently drew our attention. In an interview he said: "You know that there are two definitions of the Church: on the one hand the institution (which I detest because of its tie-up with the bourgeoisie) and on the other the Mystical Body. I refuse to play the game of eternally justifying the first by appealing to the second" (*Commonweal*, May 10, 1974). The strategy to which Böll alludes is a familiar one: you are not allowed to say a word in criticism of the institution because it is *really* the Mystical Body of Christ, and who would wish to find himself in opposition to so august a reality? In any case, since this view requires membership in the institution as a passport to the Mystical Body, it does not differ from the substantialist position on the question of membership.

3) However, there is another form of "dualism" which has been very popular among Catholics in the last decade. The contrast is made between the tedium of ordinary parish life and the vivid, vigorous life of small face-to-face groups. It is as though there were two Churches, one, like Rip van Winkle, which has fallen into slumber, and another that is meaningful and lively. It is the contrast between the overground and the underground church, or the parish and the pentecostal Church, and the latter become the norm by which the former are judged. This is an attractive and highly plausible position, since it is a fact that most people really do discover the Church in small groups rather than in crowds; but it is exposed to the "temptation of élitism" insofar as the privileged group can be closed to "outsiders" (through no fault of its own, it will hasten to explain). At any rate, this model solves the problem of membership with aplomb: membership is by affinity and sympathy, and it would seem fastidious to introduce doctrinal tests apart from general affirmations of the type "Jesus is the Lord." It has been widely predicted, by Karl Rahner among others, that the Church of the future will take this path. It seems likely that it will, although the little groups need intellectual stiffening and some sort of relationship to the larger institution. In Italy they go under the name of "alternative Church." It is quite possible that what is alternative will become mainstream, as the larger institution is revivified from below. On the other hand, many groups, lacking internal consistency, can be expected to peter out quietly.

4) "Actualist" models see the Church not as an institution but as an *event*. They do not ask *what* is the Church, nor are they concerned with *where* it might be; they ask rather *when* is the Church. And the answer is usually that "Church" is given in the breaking of bread or the experience of brotherhood. This model can appeal to and renew the most ancient tradition: *ubi eucharistia, ibi ecclesia*. It can and frequently does combine with the previous model. Few demands are made as a condition of membership, other than a general willingness to "share in the experience"; and it is not absurd on this model to start from considerable agnosticism and to hope that participation will eventually "lead somewhere." In Holland Huub Oosterhuis devised a Eucharistic Prayer "for a time of doubting" which demands of its participants nothing more than a general sense that life has dimensions of significance to which we ought to attend.

5) "Eschatological" models declare in effect that the true Church is nowhere to be found on earth, and that the best can be hoped for of any particular group of Christians is that they should be *on the way* towards their goal. The true Church is absent, elsewhere. In one sense this is a rigorous and demanding position, since it supposes a perpetual conversion and reconversion, but it is nevertheless compatible with relatively unstrenuous demands since it does not expect the Church to be other than flawed, imperfect and incomplete. Consequently it does not demand of the believer more than that he too should be on the way, that he should set off on his pilgrim journey, firm only in hope, confident that in some sense yet to be made manifest Christ holds the key to human existence.

6) "Practical" models, finally, dismiss such ecclesiological discussions as vain, and find the true reality of the Church in the active service of the world. Neither credal statements nor union with Christ nor eucharistic participation are the tests of membership, but rather the commitment to justice and brotherhood. *Praxis* is all. It is difficult to distinguish this position from other forms of purely political commitment, except that it brings to them a veneer of Christian motivation. Sometimes this secularization of faith is a last stage on the journey towards unbelief which can delay the inevitable, but not prevent it. Opponents dismiss this position as horizontalism and predict for it a short life.

It goes without saying that these models of the Church are rarely found in a chemically pure state, and that consequently the criteria of membership which they imply do not usually operate in isolation. Models and criteria combine to form the most variegated and confusing patterns of expectation and response. Roman documents generally continue to take a "substantialist" model as their starting-point, but then go on to modify its harshness by calling on elements borrowed from elsewhere, especially from "actualist" and "eschatological" models. This is despite the fact that models 2-6 have

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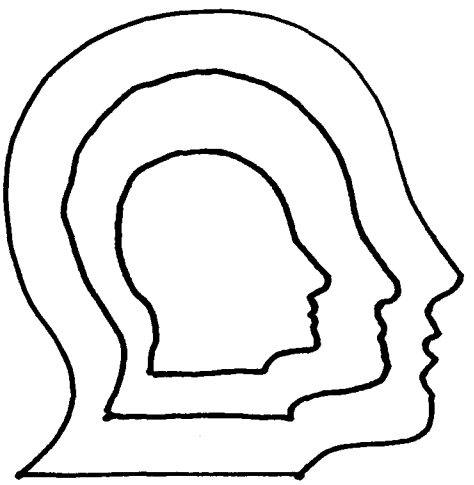
clearly been inspired by Protestant theology, but that no longer sends a chill down the spine. Most intellectually committed Christians start from models other than the "substantialist" one, but may then find that they have to claw their way back there, at least for some minimum of "substance," in order to preserve some semblance of identity in the chill deserts of absolute openness.

Each of the models (except for 2) has something positive to contribute to the rich and complex and *unfinished* idea of the Church. In that sense I agree with Ms. Ruether: the Church has still to be invented, and so the cultural conversation, which is the workshop in which it will be forged, must go on as broadly as possible. But it would be wrong to assume in advance that no flowers grow in episcopal gardens, while all is in bloom elsewhere. Meanwhile, it is the existence of overlapping and sometimes competing models—all sketches of a possible future—which makes the question "Am I a Catholic?" so difficult to answer today. To say "It all depends on your model" may not seem very satisfactory, yet it is more honest than rushing flat-footedly in. Perhaps all that talk about boundaries, even extended ones, was misleading, a relic of the Roman mania for definition; and perhaps, too, the Quakers are right to distinguish grades of membership. There is a place for the "listening" friends whose "yes" to this historically continuous community is qualified by hesitations and questionings. But to say that is already to select a model.



'Teaching as Jesus did?'

FAITH, THEOLOGY AND BELIEF

RICHARD P. McBRIEN

I HAVE been convinced for some time that the source of many, if not most, of the troubles in the Catholic Church today is our stubborn failure to discern the differences among faith, theology and belief

Many Catholics who should know better (even a cardinal or two may come readily to mind) continue to insist that faith and belief are somehow independent of theology. They assure nervous audiences of parents that the job of the religious educator is not to teach the views of modern theologians but to teach the faith, indeed "to teach as Jesus did" (the title of one of the American bishops' recent catechetical documents).

I could cite actual statements and identify the speakers, but that would serve no useful purpose. We are now long past the time when such purveyors of gross theological distortions have to be exposed. They are known, and competent religious educators do not take them seriously any longer.

In the meantime, however, many innocent bystanders remain confused. They wonder if there is any point or purpose to being and remaining a Christian. The shadow of a question mark hovers ominously over everything in sight.

In this essay I propose a way out of the problem. It is a matter of clarifying fundamental concepts and the interrelationships which exist among them. My thesis may be summarized in this fashion: faith is not theology is not belief.

1. *Faith is not theology.* Faith is a way of perceiving reality. The person of faith "sees" more than meets the eye. Faith apprehends the "beyond in our midst" (Bonhoeffer), the "other dimension" (Dupré), the ultimacy of secular experience (Gilkey), the Ground of being (Tillich). It is a judgment of faith that reality is more than the sum total of persons, places, things and events which constitute both history and the cosmos. The person of faith discerns those "signals of transcendence" (Berger) intermingled with the sights and sounds, the sensations and the smells of ordinary, everyday human experience. Faith is a stance, a posture, a fundamental attitude. Faith infers the reality of God from reality itself. But like all inferences, the evidence is circumstantial. In the terminology of the recent House Judiciary Committee hearings, there is no "smoking pistol" by which the God-problem finds its definitive resolution. Nixon is more easily tracked down than the Lord of the universe.

But inference is, after all, something to go on. It is

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not sheerly arbitrary. As Representative Cohen of Maine argued at mid-summer, if a man wakes up in the morning and finds the ground covered with fresh snow, he has every right to infer that snow fell during the night, even though he never actually saw a flake of it descend. The analogy cannot be applied precisely to our presumed experience of God, but the analogy is applicable in some measure nonetheless. We infer that reality is ultimately gracious and provident in our own experience of gracious and provident people. We infer that the world is rooted in love by reason of our own experience of love. We infer that the transcendent God is real in our own experience of the transcendent virtues of loyalty, generosity, compassion, justice, honesty, truthfulness, sensitivity, gentleness and love.

Faith involves a risk-taking. We did not need Kierkegaard to tell us that, but we sometimes talk and act as if there were no risk at all. Infallibility stands at the ready. In this view, religious people—especially Catholics—are supposedly more certain than others of the reality of God and of the divine plan of salvation. The more one thinks and speaks of God, so it seems to be assumed, the more certain one becomes of the object of those thoughts and words. That's not true, of course, and the great Christian mystics should have impressed the contrary lesson upon us by now. The closer we approach toward God, the more deafening the silence. The more intensive the quest, the more elusive the goal.

Faith is that precognitive, prereflective, prescientific perception of God in the midst of life. But unalloyed faith doesn't exist. Nowhere can we discover and isolate "pure faith." Pure faith exists only in the mind, as a logical construct. Real faith, on the other hand, exists always and only in a cognitive, (more or less) reflective, (more or less) scientific state. Every thought about the meaning of faith is precisely that: a thought about the meaning of faith. Every word of interpretation designed to articulate and illuminate the meaning and implications of faith is, again, precisely that: a word of interpretation, not faith itself. When Catholic public figures warn the rank-and-file against the contamination of "the faith" by "theology," they simply don't know what they are talking about.

Faith is not theology, to be sure, but neither does faith exist apart from, or independently of, theology. Theology comes into play at that very moment when the person of faith becomes intellectually conscious of that faith. From the very beginning faith exists in a theologically interpreted state. Indeed, it is a redundancy to put it that way: "theologically interpreted." For the interpretation of one's faith is theology itself.

Theology is, as St. Anselm of Canterbury defined it nine centuries ago, "faith seeking understanding." Theology is that process by which we bring our presumed perception of God to the level of expression. Theology is the verbalizing, in a more or less systematic manner, of the experience of God within human experience.

Theology may emerge in the form of a painting, a piece of music, a dance, a cathedral, a bodily posture, or, in its most recognizable form, in spoken and written words. These forms, of course, never do complete justice to the perception which they hope to express. Not all theology is good theology. We can ineptly translate our experience into language, or we can have a thoroughly distorted or even false experience of God in the first place, which no form, however cleverly constructed, can ever redeem.

When all is said and done, religious educators, bishops, preachers, and the Church at large do not transmit "the faith." They transmit particular interpretations or understandings of faith. In direct words: they transmit theologies.

It is entirely beside the point to warn religious educators against teaching theology instead of handing on the faith. The faith exists always and only in some theological form. The question before the Church today and forever is not *whether* the faith shall be transmitted according to some theological interpretation, but rather *which* theological interpretation is best suited to the task at a particular moment in time.

What is so offensive about appeals to "the faith" over against the "private views" of theologians is that *a particular theology* is subtly being cloaked in the aura of faith itself. Consequently, an attack upon that theology is automatically perceived as an attack upon the faith (as an attack upon the character and performance of the President was once conveniently perceived as an attack upon the office and institution of the Presidency). What some cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church learned in his theology courses (or catechism classes) in the 1920s or 1930s or what he himself may have taught as a professor of theology in the 1930s or 1940s may be useful or not in making sense of such Pauline texts as "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19), but that theology remains only that: a theology, a specific, time-conditioned, culturally-conditioned, interpretation of the vast expanse of human history and, in particular, of that crucial segment of human history wherein the Christ-event comes clearly into view and focus.

And so we reach the supreme contradiction of the piece: "the faith" which must not be confined and corrupted by *any* theology can only be understood in terms of *one* theology, in this instance the scholastic theology popular in Catholic seminaries just prior to Vatican II.

2. *Theology is not belief.* If theology is faith brought to the level of self-consciousness, then belief is theology in a kind of snapshot or frozen state. Theology is a *process;* belief is one of its several *products.* Other products include Sacred Scripture (this is exceedingly important to remember lest one mistakenly conclude that

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theology is reflection on the biblical message; it is entirely the other way round: the biblical message is itself a product of theological reflection), doctrines (beliefs elevated to the level of official approbation), dogmas (doctrines that carry the highest level of official approbation, the denial of which normally separates one from the community of faith), liturgies (*lex orandi, lex credendi*— the perception of God in ritualized form), artistic works (churches, statues, paintings, music, dance, and so forth).

In stop-action language: theology follows faith, and belief follows theology. But this is said only for purposes of distinguishing among the three elements. As we have already seen, faith and theology do not really exist apart from one another, whereas belief and theology can and do exist apart. The theologian can express all sorts of judgments about the reality of God as he/she presumably experiences God, without at the same time resorting to formulae or propositions which have received an official (doctrine) or quasi-official status (catechism, religion textbook, etc.) within the community of faith.

And that has been yet another serious distortion of the meaning of theology and of its relationship to belief and/or doctrine. Many, especially in the Roman Catholic tradition, have assumed that theology is essentially the study of church teachings. Indeed, Catholic seminary courses were for many years labeled simply "Dogma." The task of the theologian, in this view, is to analyze, explain and defend what is already "on the books" (in Denzinger and in modern papal documents). With that kind of understanding of theology abroad in the Catholic Church throughout most of this century, it is hardly surprising that the dissident posture of some contemporary Catholic theologians should have shocked and infuriated so many of their brothers and sisters in the Church. But theologians are not commissioned to be the Church's (or the Pope's) Ron Zieglers. They are more nearly her Walter Lippmanns.

3. *Faith is not belief.* There are many beliefs but only one faith. There are many Christian beliefs, but only one Christian faith. Faith is a way of perceiving God in human experience. Christian faith is a way of perceiving God in Jesus Christ as the key and focal point of all human experience.

Over the centuries of Christian history there have been literally thousands of beliefs held and transmitted at one time or another, i.e., interpretations of faith which significant segments of the Christian community found useful for expressing and articulating their own perception of God in Christ. Some of these beliefs endured the test of time (e.g., the great Christological dogmas), while others have been consigned to the intellectual rummage room (e.g., the Two Swords theory of papal authority). What has been true in Christian history is true in the contemporary Christian community. Hundreds of different beliefs vie with one another for a kind of momentary or long-term dominance. Some of these beliefs are grounded solidly in the history of the Church (e.g., belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist), while others have very short and tender roots indeed (e.g., belief in the Pope as an absolute, infallible monarch).

The sorting-out process is never finished. We are faced constantly with the problem of evaluating and re-evaluating our beliefs in the light of our ongoing experience and our fundamental (theological) interpretations of that experience, and these in turn are judged against that instinct of faith which somehow gives the whole Church its inner coherence and its radical identity and continuity. It is at the point of the "somehow" in the preceding sentence that our rich poetry about the Holy Spirit inserts itself.

At key historical moments in that sorting-out process, representative leaders of the whole Church may be compelled to assemble in solemn ecumenical council (the broader the representation, the more ecumenical the council) to confront an issue of belief that threatens the very unity of the Church. Their task is not to draw the circle so tightly that many will fall beyond its limits, but to draw it as generously as conscience allows so that as many as possible might continue to stand together within it. Nothing in this essay is intended to be prejudicial to the important, irreplaceable function of what we Catholics call the official magisterium, but neither does this essay support the ultramontane mentality which still prevails in certain vocal sectors of the American Catholic community and even among some of its pastoral leaders. For papal and/or episcopal pronouncements are no less conditioned than the biblical message itself. And if we have adjusted ourselves at long last to the *critical* reading of Sacred Scripture, then it is certainly time that we similarly abjured our galloping fundamentalism in the use and abuse of ecclesiastical documents and doctrines. It is never enough to know what a conciliar text *said*. What did the text *mean* in its original formulation? And what can the text *mean* for us *today?*

4. *Unity in diversity.* Diversity and pluralism is a fact of life in the Church today. It was a fact of life in the Church of yesterday, in biblical and post-biblical times alike. And it will remain a fact of life in the Church until the very end of history. So long as we find ourselves in these peculiarly human circumstances where no one can claim to have seen God (John 1:18), we shall proceed in a groping, tentative, provisional and halting manner: trusting our perceptions as far as we can; articulating our convictions as modestly as we can; formulating our beliefs as fairly as we can; and respecting those with different theologies and different beliefs as conscientiously as we can.

But we cannot conclude that diversity and pluralism,

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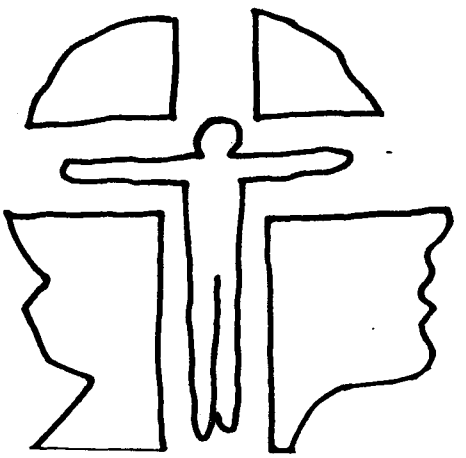
on the one hand, and unifying theological principles, on the other, are forever mutually exclusive. We Christians may differ in the way we express our perception of God and formulate those expressions consensually, but we are one in the conviction that the God of our theology and of our belief is a real, living God.

We Christians may differ in the way we express our perception of God in Jesus Christ and in the way we formulate those perceptions officially, but we are one in the conviction that the God of our theology and of our belief is truly present in Jesus of Nazareth to the extent that it can be said of Jesus alone that he is indeed the Lord of history (Phil 2:5-11).

We Christians, and particularly we Catholic Christians, may differ in the way we express our perception of God in the community of faith called the Church and we may differ, too, in the way we dogmatize that perception of God in the Church, but we are one in the conviction that there is indeed more to the Church than meets the eye, that God is present there in such wise that we can call it the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the People of God of the New Covenant.

And, finally, we Christians, and particularly we Catholic Christians, may differ in the way we express our perception of God in those ritual signs and symbols we call sacraments and we may differ in the way we precisely formulate our apprehension of God in those sacred rites, but we are one in the conviction that the God of our theology and of our belief is truly present within and under these signs which serve as climactic points of encounter between God and ourselves.

The struggle to believe is not necessarily made any easier by the mere enumeration of these abiding elements of Christian faith. Nevertheless, they might provide a tangible and meaningful context within which we can make sense of, and apply, three key principles which the Second Vatican Council bequeathed to us: (1) Not all beliefs are of equal importance. "In Catholic teaching there exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of Christian faith" (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 11). (2) There are very few beliefs indeed which one must accept in order to remain in good standing within the Christian community. "In order to restore communion and unity or preserve them, one must 'impose no burden beyond what is indispensable' (Acts 15:28)" (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 18). (3) One cannot question the integrity of those with whom one chooses to disagree on matters of theology and/or belief. "Let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 92).



Which is the Jesus of faith?

BELIEF IN JESUS TODAY

JOSEPH A. FITZMYER

No one who has lived through the last decade and watched the various movements, religious, occult, artistic, or otherwise, associated with the name of Jesus, can fail to realize what that Palestinian Jew of over nineteen hundred years ago has come to mean to modern man. This is not a phenomenon that is restricted to North America, for areas in Europe, Asia and South America have been caught up in it. Liberation has been proclaimed in his name—even revolution. Nor is it a phenomenon that is restricted to Christians, for who has not heard of "Jews for Jesus"? And to paraphrase an ancient Christian writer, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have heard, what we have looked upon concerns the Word of Life. For to many people today Jesus means life. And the question is why.

Yet at the same time there is for individual Christians who are identified with various churches having a traditional Christian heritage a real struggle to believe. Many of them readily identify themselves as Christians and would not have it otherwise. Yet they find it so difficult to articulate that Christian identification, to express to themselves or to their neighbors what that really means or should mean. All that such an identification should entail might have to be explained by diverse factors,

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but the heart of it is a belief in Jesus. Yet what should that mean for a Christian of today?

There is a genuine paradox here. On the one hand, we perceive a widespread and real captivation, especially among young people, with the person of Jesus of Nazareth; on the other, a no less real inability to explain what that captivation should mean as Christian belief. The problem is not new, and better heads than mine have wrestled with it. But I should like to record here some reflections about its diverse aspects. It is a multifaceted problem, and the question is where to begin. Being identified with things biblical, I shall concentrate on the biblical aspects of the problem, realizing full well that there are other aspects that merit serious consideration, either from the traditional or systematic viewpoint.

Let us begin with a superficial aspect of the problem, "Which Jesus?" Which Jesus captivates? In which Jesus should the Christian of today put his faith? Which is the Jesus of faith? This question may seem facetious, but it is not so meant. For the twentieth century adolescent or adult Christian has eventually to sort out the Jesus in whom he believes. There is, for instance, the Jesus of the mass-media, the Jesus of the religious-goods shops, the Jesus of art and fiction; the Jesus of the catechism, the Jesus of piety, the Jesus of the sacraments and of mysticism; the Jesus of theology, the Jesus of dogmatic tradition, the Jesus of the New Testament. And, of course, there is the Jesus of history, the living person who crossed man's history in an out-of-the-way corner of the world centuries ago. But for many Christians of today the Jesus in whom they think they believe is an amalgam of many of these influences and would-be sources of information about or interpretations of him. And little effort is made by most to sort out the impressions that these influences and sources make—the authentic from the imaginative.

The different views of Jesus presented by the mass-media (e.g., *Jesus Christ Superstar, Godspell*), the religious-goods shops (e.g., Sacred Heart statues, the infant Jesus of Prague), diverse works of art through the centuries (from the Byzantine Pantocrator through Fra Angelico to Salvador Dali), the portraits of novelists (e.g., Nikos Kazantakis' *Last Temptation of Christ*), and even some forms of piety (e.g., Devotio moderna, the *Imitation of Christ*) have been largely the products of speculation and imagination. One need not take too pejorative a view of this Jesus, for it has been a powerful factor in Christian life, especially in Christian education. But it creates a problem, for it is just what it purports to be: a picture of Jesus created by a Christian imagination seeking to exert psychological influence on people for some purpose (usually not ignoble).

For instance, during the student demonstrations of yesteryear against the draft a picture appeared in newspapers of a young man carrying a poster that read: "Would Jesus Carry a Draftcard?" Though we do not know whether Jesus would have or not, it was *imagined* that he would not have—and this Jesus of the imagination was used to fire others to the obviously liberating position of taking action against the draft. Or, to cull an example from a hallowed classic of Christian piety, I may be permitted to cite Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. As a loyal son of Ignatius, I recognize that his booklet has molded the lives of countless Christians over the last four centuries and has produced many sainted members in the Christian community. But its usually unnoticed power and secret is the use of the Jesus of the imagination: "Here it will be to see in imagination the synagogues, villages and towns where Jesus preached" (#91). Or the fifth of its Rules for Eating: "Whilst one is eating, let him imagine he sees Christ our Lord and his disciples at table, and consider how He looks, how He speaks, and then strive to imitate Him. In this way, his mind will be occupied principally with our Lord, and less with the provision for the body" (#214). In the last sentence, Ignatius' motive is noble indeed; but his exercise remains one of the imagination. And to the same genre of speculation belong many of the modern fictionalized Jesuses, including those that use episodes in the canonical gospels as springboards for highly imaginative presentations.

Now if one were to do away with the Jesus of the imagination, one would rid us of some of the greatest masterpieces of western art and literature. I do not suggest that we get rid of the Jesus of the imagination, but that we recognize it for what it is. It may be a powerful emotional and psychological aid to the understanding of the Jesus of faith, but it is not the latter. Such creations of human imagining and speculation are not the object of Christian faith and sometimes do no little harm by posing as such.

Other Views

Perhaps we come closer to that object when we consider the Jesus of the catechism, or the Jesus of theology. The Jesus of such forms is presented as interpretations of the Jesus of faith and have a certain normative value; yet they cannot simply be equated with the latter. The Jesus of the catechism presents in simple catchword formulae the essence of the Jesus of faith, but few will regard it as the full expression, even verbal, of that object; and this would have to be said of the Dutch Catechism (intended for adults) as well as of the Baltimore Catechism (intended for children). On the other hand, the Jesus of theology is undoubtedly a far richer explication of that object, for it represents a genuine attempt of the Christian mind, imagination, and heart to plumb the depths of the mystery of Christ—*fides quaerens intellectum*. But it is usually proposed with the aid of philosophical props, which may have to be

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recognized as time-conditioned. Moreover, a given theological view may prove to be more unacceptable to modern man, not because of the Jesus of faith that it seeks to render intelligible, but because of the philosophical construct that is employed. For example, the classic theological discussions about the forms of human knowledge that Jesus possessed—experiential, infused and beatific—made use of props borrowed from types of scholastic philosophy. They answered certain questions posed about him within the framework of such a philosophical construct, but created an image of his humanity that tended to border on the monstrous (How would one get all of those types of knowledge into one finite, created human intellect?). In such a Jesus it was not easy to put one's understanding, let alone one's faith.

Closer to the heart of the question is the Jesus of dogmatic tradition, by which I mean the Jesus as proposed for Christian belief in the post-New Testament centuries, when the Christian community saw fit to reaffirm its corporate faith through various conciliar definitions as a reaction to misconceptions of him that cropped up from time to time. This would be the Jesus of Nicea, of Chalcedon, of Constantinople, and so on: that he was not a mere creature, that he was a divine person, with a human nature and a divine nature, etc. Here we obviously encounter the Jesus of faith more than the Jesus of theology. But by the same token, since conciliar definitions were not merely reformulations of what the New Testament or the primitive revelation of him had affirmed—they did not simply put it in other words, but reconceived the primitive data with the aid of a differing philosophy—these definitions, too, carry with them a time-conditioned element. It is not that they are not normative for Christian faith because of that; they are indeed, but in their own way. For they may well cease in time to speak to Christians who employ a different philosophy or a different mode of thinking.

For instance, Chalcedon defined that Jesus was not only "consubstantial with the Father in his divinity, consubstantial with us in his humanity," but that "the one selfsame Christ, only-begotten Son and Lord, must be acknowledged in two natures without any commingling or change or division or separation," and that "they are united in one person . . ." (*The Church Teaches* [St.. Louis :B. Herder, 1955] 172). The understanding of "person" in that definition was something like that of Boethius: "a subsistent individual with a rational nature." How different it is from the idea of a person that is current today in ordinary thinking and even in philosophical personalism. As a result, the Christian of today finds the Boethian definition scarcely expressive of the captivating reality of Jesus of Nazareth. It is perhaps an inadequate expression of modern personalist thinking to describe a "person" as a human being who shows openness and love toward another. Yet something like that is meant when one hears the current phrase, "He/she is a real person." (Ironically enough, from an Aristotelian point of view, it defines "person" more in terms of a potency than an act!) And in this sense Christians of today would tend to say that Jesus was "a real person;" indeed, some would even go so far as to say that he was a real, human person. And that seems to counter Chalcedon. What is operative here is a restored emphasis on his humanity, counteracting a misplaced, but oft repeated Catholic monophysitism ("Well he is God, isn't he?"—To which one would have to reply, "Yes, in the half-truth sense!").

The point is: If one wants to think in the categories in which the "person" of Jesus was defined at Chalcedon, that definition remains, and will remain, ever normative for such thinking. But the Christian of today usually does not use that understanding of "person" and detects in it a time-conditioned mode of thinking that is born of a post-New Testament controversy spawned by a certain type of hellenistic philosophy. For all its normative character, such a Jesus of dogmatic tradition says little to the twentieth-century Christian. However, not every Jesus of dogmatic tradition encounters the same problem, and fundamentally the Jesus of dogmatic tradition must be respected for what it is: an on-going interpretation of him in the Spirit-guided trajectory across the centuries since the apostolic times that of itself feeds Christian faith.

But at the root of the tradition lies the Jesus of the New Testament, and ultimately the person of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. In one sense, we must treat those two aspects of Jesus together. For Christian faith is not merely a response to the accosting of man by the historical Jesus who preached in the synagogues, villages and towns of ancient Palestine, or an allegiance to him and his cause, or a personal dedication and commitment to his way of life. It also involves an acceptance of him that the New Testament writers or the early Christian community passed on to the generations of followers to come.

This may seem to interject between the Christian of today and the person of Jesus himself an extraneous element—a book inherited from early Christianity. It may also seem to extol the Jesus of the New Testament above the real historical person of Jesus of Nazareth. It is, however, not so intended; and that is why both aspects of Jesus must be kept together at this point in our discussion. For the Christian of today must realize that he has no channel or pipeline back to the historical Jesus—or even, more importantly, to the risen Jesus (an aspect to which I shall return below)—that is independent of the Jesus of the New Testament. Take the latter away, and you know practically nothing about him. For what are the Jesus of tradition, the Jesus of mystical experience, the Jesus of sacramental life, the

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Jesus of the experience of communal Christian life (monastic, religious, or otherwise) without the Jesus of the New Testament?

The Jesus of the New Testament is an essential element of Christian faith, for in God's providence men of the early Christian community were inspired by his Spirit to record impressions of him, of his person, of his words and actions; and that record has become the privileged norm of Christian faith. The faith of a Christian today means not only an allegiance of personal commitment to the Palestinian Jew of over nineteen hundred years ago, but also an acceptance of the normative understanding of him with which the early Christian community was destined by God to endow us. To borrow a phrase from Islam, in this sense we are the People of the Book.

Two Difficulties

There are two obvious difficulties with such an understanding of Christian faith that call for some clarification. First of all, it may seem to interject the Church between modern man and Christ Jesus. However, I have deliberately spoken of the early Christian community as inspired by God to record its portraits of Jesus rather than of the Church. The latter term connotes the structured, organized community of believers that historically developed from Jesus himself and the movement that he initiated and that in God's providence has had the role of shaping the development of the post-New Testament dogmatic tradition about him. But there is a problem here that concerns the relation of the Book to the Church. For the Jesus of the New Testament is likewise a norm for the Church itself in its faith and conduct. The Church of every generation has to square itself with the Jesus of the New Testament as well as the Jesus of history, if it is to remain faithful to its mission.

It is, of course, true that the early community experienced Jesus and existed prior to the composition of the New Testament writings, and in this sense the latter are in a secondary situation. But the heritage of that early community, especially in the New Testament portraits of Jesus, is privileged and takes precedence over and has an incomparable normative value for Christian life and faith, and even of the Church. In reality, there is no other share in that early Christian experience that is not rooted in the New Testament formulation of it. When it comes to a *full* expression of what Christian faith should mean in the twentieth century, other factors must indeed be considered. For that expression could be understood in a biblicizing, fundamentalistic way that is here not intended. The Jesus of the New Testament, and the normative value that he is for succeeding generations, is likewise only inceptive as a norm. It represents the indispensable beginning of the trajectory, rooted in the New Testament and in the historical Jesus, but the fully articulated faith of the twentieth century would have to reckon as well with the developing dogmatic tradition and the contemporary theological expression of it.

Perhaps one could introduce an analogy at this point. In a sense, the New Testament serves as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights of the Christian Church; the dogmatic tradition would act as its amendments. This analogy does not walk on all fours, admittedly. But the basic thrust of it seems to be valid. Consequently, the Jesus of the New Testament plays an essential role in modern Christian faith in him, even for the Christian of the Church today.

The second difficulty is the obvious time-conditioned character of the New Testament portrait of Jesus itself. For the Jesus of the New Testament is presented to us in Greek (not in twentieth-century American English), in a second-rate form of Greek literary tradition (scarcely comparable with the masterpieces of fifth-century Athens), and in literary forms that are strange (scarcely readily intelligible to twentieth-century man). Moreover, there is a diversity in the portraits that the New Testament presents: the Jesus of Paul (the earliest) is different from that of the gospel tradition or of the Apocalypse. We rarely reflect, however, on how impoverished Christian faith would be, if it were fed by only one testimony of the early community, e.g., by only one gospel. It might have simplified matters for us, since we would never have had to cope with the differences and discrepancies either within the Synoptic tradition or between the Synoptics and John. Yet how oversimplified it would have been! How monolithic! But it is precisely the diversity of the portraits of Jesus in the New Testament, with all their time-conditioned conception and formulation, that accosts Christians across the centuries, generation after generation, and response of Christian faith must accordingly be diverse. The Christian Church of these latter days, as well as individual Christians, in seeking to square itself/themselves with the historical Jesus and the Jesus of the New Testament, is confronted precisely by this diversity and its time-conditioned aspect.

However, because of this diverse, time-conditioned character of the Jesus of the New Testament, one has to learn to cope with it in a sophisticated manner that is consonant with the world in which we live. To pick up the New Testament and attempt to read it today in a literal-minded, fundamentalistic way is to miss the real Jesus of the New Testament. It would be to treat the time-conditioned aspects as absolutes, to read first-century prose as if it were written with the sophistication of modern nuanced prose, and eventually to fail to see the forest for the trees. Even within the gospel tradition, the Jesus of the parables differs from the Jesus of the miracle stories or the Jesus of the pronouncement stories. (For the diversity, one might well consult here the book

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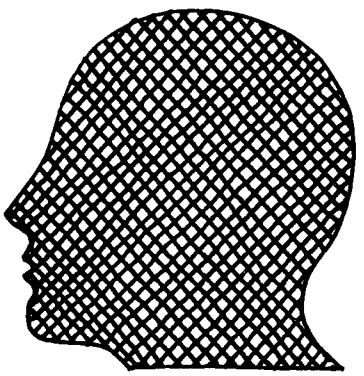
of E. Trocmé, *Jesus as Seen by His Contemporaries.*)

But in admitting this, we are putting our finger on still another problematic aspect of the Jesus of the New Testament. We stressed above the need to keep in tandem the Jesus of history and the Jesus of the New Testament for the proper understanding of the object of Christian faith. Yet we implicitly admitted that they were not the same and were not to be simply identified. If Christian faith has to be normed by the Jesus of the New Testament (with all its diversity), that norm, though rooted in his historical reality and personality, is nonetheless an interpretation of him. The modern study of the gospel tradition, keenly aware of the Synoptic Problem, the thrust of form criticism and redaction criticism, as well as the complication of the Johannine question, along with the diverse Pauline interpretations of the Christ-event, have taught us that we have in the New Testament picture of Jesus a varied and diverse series of interpretations of Jesus himself. (We might call them diverse "theologies," were we to attempt to synthesize the teachings about him given by a Paul, a Mark, a Luke, or a John.) But, in reality, these New



Testament interpretations do not bring us immediately into contact with the historical Jesus; the extent to which we contact the historical Jesus through them is at best indirect, and problematic at that. And that is why the root of Christian faith is the tandem: the Jesus of history as presented by the New Testament.

When we keep this in mind, we understand why the often-tried attempt to psychoanalyze Jesus is doomed to failure. Since what we have in the New Testament is an interpretation of Jesus written down not less than a generation after the events themselves, these records—for all they attribute to him or put on his lips—remain precisely that, interpretations of him. John 8:6 records, indeed, that Jesus "wrote with his finger on the ground," but that is all we know that he ever wrote, and that has disappeared.

Differently from Paul, whose authentic letters might, with reasonable cautions, be analyzed or used to scrutinize Paul's consciousness or awareness of his apostolic mission, we have nothing similar from Jesus. We have only what early Christian writers said he said and did, with all the differences and discrepancies known to exist within the Synoptic tradition and between it and John. Consequently, we must beware of so understanding the Jesus of the New Testament as though he were simply identifiable with the Jesus of history. For this reason we cannot really analyze his messianic consciousness, his growth in knowledge of himself—or of his divinity (as it is often naively so formulated). Most of the attempts to analyze him have been nothing more than the asking of anachronistic questions, usually born of the Chalcedonian distinction of person and natures. Such questions have been put to scenes of the New Testament, and especially of the gospels, which were really composed with an entirely different purpose, not to mention a different formulation and conception.

But to admit that there is a time-conditioned element in the New Testament and that the Jesus of the New Testament is not simply identifiable with the Jesus of history would seem to admit that there is some bit (at least) of the Jesus of the imagination in the New Testament portrait of him itself. This is, of course, not to be denied. But the difference lies precisely in the inspired and Spirit-guided character of this interpretation of him. And in this is found the privileged nature of the Jesus of the New Testament and the normative value of its portrait. This is why the roots of the Christian faith must be traced ultimately to it.

Moreover, to identify the Jesus of the New Testament with the Jesus of history is in reality to miss the real meaning of the Jesus of the New Testament and the pertinence of that Jesus for twentieth-century Christian faith. Such an identification would spring from a naive preoccupation with the words and deeds of Jesus as recorded in the gospel tradition, as if they were all authentic without further ado. It would represent a fundamental neglect of the earliest interpretation of him in the New Testament, the Pauline interpretation of the Christ-event, with its emphasis not on what Jesus did and said, but on the value of his suffering, death, burial, resurrection and exaltation for mankind. For the essence of the Jesus of the New Testament is not in the historicity of this or that word or deed, but in the proclamation of him as the Christ and the Lord.

Faith in Christ Jesus must always be rooted in the person of Jesus yet not merely in the person of the historical Jesus. For the Jesus of Christian faith is indeed Jesus of Nazareth, but precisely as the one "who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25). Christian faith, then, is essentially an Easter-faith, a response made to God manifest in Jesus Christ, a reaction to the Word of God that comes through him and his Spirit as active in the Christian community today. And it is precisely in the tandem combination of the historical Jesus and the Jesus of the New Testament, proclaimed to all generations as Savior and Risen Lord, that constitutes the mystifying, captivating, enigmatic reality of Jesus today.

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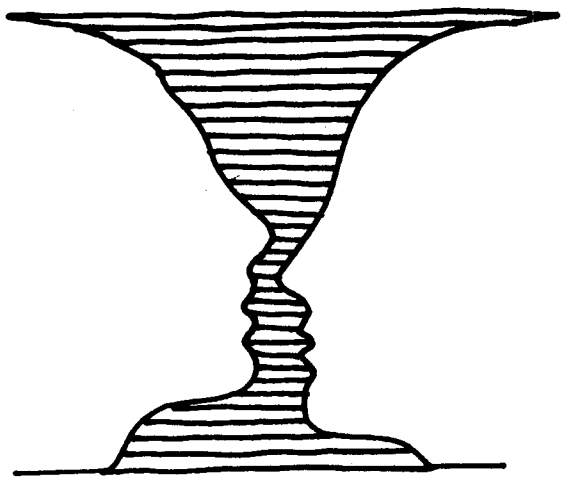
When Paul wrote to the Galatians who had been enticed to listen to "another gospel" (1:6), he made it clear to them that through Christ and faith in him they had found not only justification and freedom, but also a new life. And, as the first theologian of the Christian church, he formulated the thesis of the integration of Christian life: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself to me" (Gal 2:20). Here Paul puts his finger on the essential role of faith in Christ in modern life: the ontological reality of life in Christ must be brought to the surface of psychological awareness through faith. Christ lives in the Christian (the ontological situation); and as a result the very physical life *(kata sarka)* has to be lived "by faith." It is just another way of expressing the old distinction between the indicative and the imperative: Be what you are.

The Christian must manifest in his/her very physical life *(kata sarka)* that he/she is a Christian, that he/she is motivated by faith in Christ Jesus, and that the fascination of the Risen Jesus can captivate a man or woman of the twentieth century as well as it did Paul of Tarsus. For the Christian of today is like Paul: one who encounters the Risen Lord only in faith. Paul, if he ever did know the historical Jesus, considered it naught in comparison with his faith experience of him: "even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view *(kata sarka)*, we regard him thus no longer" (2 Cor 5:16). And that is why the Jesus of the New Testament is essential to Christian faith even today.



Is there a distinctly Catholic ethic?

DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF MORAL THEOLOGY

DANIEL C. MAGUIRE

Pity the Catholic moralist of the recent past. He is dead, but with difficulty does he rest in peace. Tar and feathers were his final portion and jeering cries of "legalist" and "manualist" attended his undignified demise. A few quiet, unbelaboring words about the deceased would appear to be in order if for no other reason than to justify our unseemly lack of grief. His features were all too familiar.

First of all, he was a man—always a man and never a woman—and usually a celibate man. This had to lend a primordial partiality to his probes into the mysteries of the *humanum*. He was further an Apollonian man, confident of his abilities to draw lines. He rushed in to systematize neatly where the more modest hesitated to tread. With all, he was ingenious. He forged some tools that are of enduring utility, but he became a prisoner of good but overweighted categories like "direct and indirect voluntary." Because of this he could not even consider cases where abortion, sterilization, or mercy death can be morally justified. These and other matters such as divorce and remarriage, nonmarital sexual exchange, masturbation, and homosexual love-making were wrapped in taboo. As is the way with taboo, which is the classical escape from doing ethics, no circumstance could justify them. Discussion served only to rationalize the prohibition.

The old moralist had more answers than questions . . . a danger signal in any intellectual endeavor. He was all too alien to ambiguity and to the borderline case (not necessarily a rarity) where the moral person has to admit that different and possibly contradictory courses of action are arguably moral, where moral inquiry does not yield one clear "right answer." He avoided the untidy avenues to moral truth such as feeling and affectivity and he did not acknowledge the primacy of creative imagination as a moral faculty. He was linguistically naive and overconfident of his principles.

The old moralist was more concerned with private, interpersonal issues of morality than with the social, political, and legal structures that control the inequitable and unjust distribution of goods and bads, of power and impotence on planet earth. His respect for life was uneven, absolutely opposed to all abortion and mercy death, too permissive in practice regarding military

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slaughter. His work was often hamstrung by an oracular hierarchical magisterium whose authority was sustained by a reductively magical use of the theological notion of the assistance of the Holy Spirit, implying *ex officio* powers of discernment. In matters of church law, the old moralist was handicapped by a very un-Italian literalism which did not recognize the essentially hortatory character of church law. He was furthermore negligent of his Christian and biblical roots, and also availed himself too little of the real strengths in the Catholic tradition.

Following the directions of the old moralist, you could attain the "state of grace" (a quite unbiblical notion), and his idea of sin departed from ethical realism's basic insight that there can be no sin where there is no harm. Too often "sin" offended not persons or God but the reigning categories of moral theology.

If offense has been given by speaking such ill about dead moralists, then consider the motive of the attack: the deceased was a good teacher and his teaching is still influential in official and unofficial ways in Catholic schools, churches, pastoral letters, and codes of Catholic hospitals. His influence lives.

Whither Ecumenical Ethics?

If Bernard Häring is right when he says that Catholic moral theology might now be better termed "ecumenical ethics," the positive challenge is to develop the best possibilities of this ethics. As Catholic ethics and Protestant ethics come together, it is to be hoped that a more sensitive and Christian ethics might come of the interchange.

In general, it could be said that, from a Catholic view, a healthy ethics could arise from the avoidance of all the above listed errors. Let us, however, give specific focus to three subjects: the feminization of ethics, "situation ethics," and the retrieval of the Catholic heritage. These subjects are foundational and will influence all the particular issues currently debated.

The liberation of women could easily be the most profound ethical development in our day. It involves much more than a discovery of the myths which have distorted the personal reality of women. Since woman is the correlative of man, and since it is impossible to distort one correlative without distorting the other, we are awakening to the grim admission that we have been functioning out of false categorizations of both femaleness and maleness. Since these are essential dyadic components of humanness, and since the discernment of true humanness is the supreme task of ethics, the distortion struck at the heart of the ethical enterprise.

In the weird atmosphere of this distortion, we came to think that the only task that had to be shared by man and woman was biological reproduction. Aside from that men could go it alone. The truth, however, is that "the complete human molecule," in Teilhard de Chardin's terms, "is a duality, comprising masculine and feminine together." He speaks of "the necessary synthesis of the two principles, male and female, in the building of the human personality." (See his *Human Energy.*)

Human activity that operates under the false cloud of monosexuality could scarcely avoid dire and perverting fallout. And yet, monosexual assumptions reign. The truly natural thing is for men and women to conspire in everything, not just in making babies. This would appear to be a basic rule for the humanization of our activities whether those activities be in government, art, education, medicine, or ethics.

Ethics! There's the rub! No activity could less afford to be defeminized and thus dehumanized. While granting that femininity is not confined to women or masculinity to men, it is a fair contention that a proportionate presence of women in the field of ethics is necessary to achieve for ethics a humanizing duality. Clearly I am not just saying here that we should ask the ladies in to chat about "woman-related" issues like sex and abortion. This would limit woman and her role to genitality as all the bad myths have done. Rather her presence in ethics must be felt in the realm of theory where the foundations are laid and where questions are asked, or often, more importantly, *unasked.*

It is widely believed that somewhere out there in the misty moors of ethical inquiry, there roams a monster called *situation ethics* whose breath is fire and chaos. Situation ethics is largely believed to be an attack on principles, stability and objectivity in morals. And indeed, one moralist with a huge following has written that "human actions are good or bad according to their circumstances." Given the mutability and unpredictability of circumstances, only a very slippery ethics could result from factoring ever varying circumstances into ethical judgments. Another moralist has charged that, properly understood, even "Catholic morality is, in fact, *situation ethics.*"

All of which would seem to justify a conclusion that the art-science of ethics is in a state of dangerous disarray. Of course, the first author cited above was Thomas Aquinas who in his *Summa* (I, II q. 18 a.3) asks whether circumstances determine the goodness or badness of actions and concludes in intelligible Latin "*actiones humanae secundum circumstantias sunt bonae vel malae.*" The second quote was from Fr. Louis Monden, S.J. in his cautiously written book *Sin, Liberty and Law.* (p. 104)

The term "situation ethics" is a red herring. As language, it is a terminal case, bruised beyond utility by polemical usage. Much of what was generating the heat here arose from what James Gustafson aptly termed a "misplaced debate" about principles and circumstantial context. Since moral meaning is found both in principles

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and in the circumstances which distinguish one situation from another, ethics can be seen as a conversation between principles and context conducted by the moral agent. All ethics must therefore be "principle-ist" and situational.

Beyond that perennial squabble, however, it must be noted that in today's ethical climate, principled morality seems to be under constant attack, almost, as it were, on principle. One who values highly the moral constancies housed in principles is liable to charges of having a classicalist mentality, contextual insensitivity and similar blights. Sometimes the charges are true. But sometimes they result from the mood of a time when flux is so normal, and often productive of so much good that constancy is suspect, whether it be in the form of principle, personal commitment (as in marriage), or in tradition.

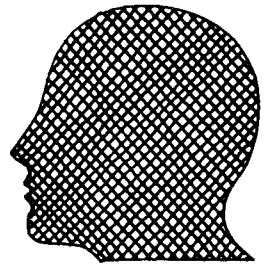
Some of yesterday's and today's moralists have reduced principles to statistical generalizations. It has been suggested that principles are not unlike the punt on fourth down rule that guides quarterbacks. Hard empirical experience tends to show that a certain general practice produces better results. However, there is a qualitative difference between the punt rule and "Thou shalt not commit adultery." The wife of an adulterous quarterback would be quick to perceive that difference.

The discovery of a principle is a sublime event in moral history. More basic than the question of why principles are not always situationally applicable, is the reason why they generally point toward humanizing value. A valid principle is rooted in *the* foundational moral experience . . . *the experience of the sacred value of personal life.* More than mere empirical generalization, principles are rather the fruit of affective, intuitional, and creative appreciation of what befits persons in view of what they are.

Philosopher John Rawls' famous example of a son's obligation to keep a promise made to his dying father after the father's death, when no one knew of the promise, goes to the heart of the matter. Persons are such that a promise made to them has a sacred force apart from all calculation of what a breach of promise would do to the needed practice of promise-keeping in society. Immanuel Kant was also at the nub of ethical experience when he wrote that being honest when dishonesty would have enormous advantages and be perfectly safe, has an experiential value which "elevates the soul and arouses the wish to be able to act in this way." (Kant, of course, was so impressed with this experience that he slighted the limited applicability of practical moral principles and lapsed into pernicious absolutism. The worst of errors occur when the best of insights go awry.)

In my own language I would say that every principle is reductively an experience of the value of persons and/or their environment and therefore principles are instructive even when in a particular case they may not be applicable. An age that denigrates principles is open to ethical shallowness. Deep down in principles there is contact with the sanctity of life that distinguishes us from more complete barbarians. Therefore if there are principles urging that counterproductivity of violence, the fitting conjoinment of sexual exchange and commitment, the duty to company with a dying person and not hasten his death, the value of compassion, truth-telling, sincerity, promise-keeping, etc. we should pause at length before the counsel of these principles before we leave them for a more morally valuable alternative. Only a principled person may depart from principles safely.

With all of this said, we may still find relevance in Proudhon's remark that "The fecundity of the unexpected far exceeds the statesman's prudence." Our principles, like our statesmen, can be surprised. The limits of valuable moral principles are many. A moral judgment is ultimately a judgment of how persons and things relate and what meaning they have in their concreteness. Not all of that meaning can be packaged in principle. There is an irreducible uniqueness about persons and their situations. Without denying the pervasive



commonality of our experience, it can be said of every erotic encounter and every death, of every spoken word and every corporate merger, that there never has been another one like it. This leaves us with the problem that in ethics too, one man's meat may be another man's poison. What is right for me may be wrong for you.

Furthermore, we may have to leave our principles when we discover they have spurious origins. There are bad principles, just as there are bad prophets. Principles are not *ex nihilo.* Their breeding ground is history with all the pandemonium thereof. For example, many people in evaluating the eroticism of persons who are homosexual, operate out of a principle that bans all homosexual love-making. The roots of that principle are as many as they are suspect. There was the deeply ingrained, self-preservative reverence for fertility that developed in a species that was precariously surviving. There was the bad biology that thought of sperm as a collection of *homunculi*, little persons who needed only a womb to grow in. There were the long held depersonalized views of sexuality in biologistic, people-breeding terms. There was the bad exegesis of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures. There is the instinctive threat posed by otherness in deeply felt matters. And there is the special threat and hostility of those whose own heterosexual identity is unsure. The issue of homosexual love-making

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cannot be handled by reasonings which simply resonate such tainted origins.

Principles also are not adequate to lead moral persons into the realm of the heroic, or to what has been called "ultraobligation." Excessive confidence in principles may represent a timid hungering for a code, a code which might, in the words of the psychologist of religion, E. R. Goodenough, function as "an active and actual curtain from the *tremendum*."

Principles, furthermore, conflict with one another. You may have to tell an untruth to someone who intends murder in order to save his intended victim. In the balance of this situation, life-saving conflicts with and outweighs truth-telling. Also, overconfidence in principles can devastate thought by suppressing questions. For a long time we did not even ask whether sex in marriage is always and necessarily more loving and moral than sex in another context; or whether *omission* and "letting nature take its course" might at times be more cruel and less moral than direct positive *commission* to end a life.

And, finally, there must be room, if one's perspective be Christian, for the possibility of "a vertical charismatic stroke." An André Dumas writes of the Judaeo-Christian God: "He does not preserve and maintain; he breaks through. He is called a living God unlike dead idols or ideas, because he takes by surprise and reshapes the very things that idols neglect or confirm." To say "I never heard of such a thing!" is not a sufficient argument against surprisingly new ethical positions.

* * *

If ecumenism means homogenized Christianity, it is doomed to failure or to dullness. True ecumenism should support diversity not blur it. If as Teilhard says, "Nothing is comprehensible except through its history," if history shapes us in fundamental ways, then ecumenical Catholics are not ecumenical Protestants and all pretense to sameness is the stuff of farce. Let "ecumenical ethics" take heed.

In the brevity imposed on me by stern editorial fiat, I can only intimate, not argue, that there is a distinctively Catholic ethic with much positive content that should not be allowed to drop out of currency. By studying everything from New Testamental "early Catholicism" to medieval councils, from contemplative orders to the Roman Curia, from fast days to rosary beads, amid debacles and glories, distinctive themes of Catholic moral and religious experience can be discerned, redeemed when need be, and always built upon. I will suggest a few. Obviously I am not saying that none of these themes is in any way present in other forms of historical Christian experience or elsewhere. Rather, they are salient and specific in the Catholic story. Obviously, too, all these themes are abusable.

1. The Bonifacian Strain: It may seem unlikely to find a connection between the prophetic Berrigans and Boniface VIII, but look closely. The Catholic tradition put the state not only under the judgment of God, but of the Church. Noting the existence of a spiritual and material sword, Boniface averred with distinctively Catholic gall that "Both of these are within the power of the Church. . . ." Granting the Bonifacian excesses of fighting the divinization of the state by divinizing the Church, it must be allowed that there is a mind-set operative here that is antidotal to statist pretensions.

2. The Executive Problem: Catholicism has combined a strong sense of structure and office with a kind of Italian cynicism about the good will and reliability of officers. The problem of swollen executive power was faced. Deposition of popes, thoroughly ingrained and orthodox streams of conciliarism, and the wisdom of *orbis major urbe* relativized and limited top-heavy papalism.

3. Mirth: Belloc was on to something when he wrote:

Wherever a Catholic sun doth shine,
there is lots of laughter and good red wine;
At least I've always found it so,
Benedicamus Domino!

Catholicism is heavy with transcendence which is the precondition of laughter. The visible powers and dominations, however awesome, are not ultimately decisive. Being too serious is neither moral nor Catholic. Dionysus was never effectively banned from Rome.

4. Liturgy: The Catholic liturgical instinct is geared to assert the reality of other dimensions and other possibilities. It reaches beyond words to what eye has not seen nor ear heard. At root it is inimical to the suffocating vision of what Marcuse calls the "one-dimensional society." Like laughter, it has socio-political significance.

5. Hopefulness: Because of a strong belief in realized eschatology and a strong disbelief in the total corruption of persons by sin, Catholicism is heavy with hope. Hope is liberalizing and yields a capacity for risk. With all due thanks to the chastening Protestant sense of sin, it is unnaive, active hope that is the undergirding of moral and social evolution.

6. A sense of moral ambiguity: If more Catholics knew what Alexander VIII did on December 7, 1690, Alexander VIII bumper stickers might have become a commonplace. The pope condemned "absolute tutiorism," a moral system which said that on a debated moral issue, one may not follow an opinion that expands one's moral freedom unless it is clearly *certain*. This meant that a rigorous opinion had to be held to, even when solid reasons and good moral authorities had rendered it doubtful. The papal action here constituted an acknowledgment of moral ambiguity and a signal endorsement of human moral freedom. Had the Catholic moralist whose passing we marked in our opening lines drawn more from this debate, he would have been spared some of the corners into which he painted him-

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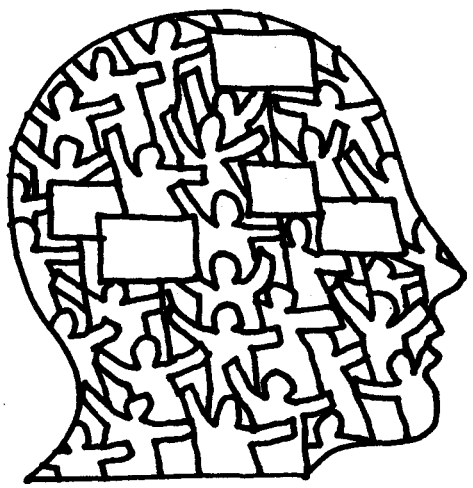
self. Note too; the debate is not irrelevant to contemporary moral ambiguities.

Also fruitfully explorable within the Catholic tradition would be the sense of law and its relationship to morality, the institutionalization of prophecy attempted in religious orders, the relationship between contemplation and action, the priestly tradition with its stress on the value of personal symbols. Rummaging in the Catholic past is not useless. Among other things, it might show that the basic indictment against the moral theologian of the recent past is that he was so un-Catholic.

We are badgered today by untrammeled questioning in all areas. Open marriage, genetic manipulation, psychosurgery, civil religion, multi-national power, atomic proliferation, etc. Our innocence is spent and confusion mounts. Karl Mannheim, in his *Ideology and Utopia*, observes that the Sophists grew out of a world in which "previous unambiguity" had been shattered. Questioning the unquestionable could make disjointed and skeptical Sophists of us all. Or it could, as it did for Socrates, lead us to deeper appreciations of the mystery of humanness which is unfolding helter-skelter about us.



Social justice vs. the new interiorism

AN INTEGRAL FAITH FOR TODAY

PETER J. HENRIOT

"Faith without works is dead." That brief line from the second chapter of the Epistle of James has been the occasion of many a struggle in the history of the Christian community. Today it appears to be gaining a new meaning—and consequently becoming a new source of struggle—in the evolving understanding of authentic Christian faith.

Is it possible to be a person of faith without at the same time being a person committed to the work of social justice? And what does involvement in social change mean in terms of one's faith, prayer and religious response? These are questions which inevitably arise when we look around at the contemporary awareness growing in the American Catholic community of the need for a faith which both enables us to believe and demonstrates the reality of our belief.

I think that the critical faith challenge in the immediate future will be the task of integrating religious experience and social involvement. Such an integration is necessary in order to meet the test of *credibility*—both for ourselves and for others. My thoughts on this theme grow out of my own experience of tension where there is lack of integration. And my reflections are enriched as the result of sharing for the past year with a Task Force which specifically studied this topic. More about the outcome of that Task Force later.

In getting a sense of what is moving in the Catholic community in the United States today, it does not take much sophistication to note two strong trends. These are not trends unique to Catholics. Indeed, they appear to mark much of the American community at large. On the one hand, social involvement, the commitment to change unjust social structures, continues to occupy the attention of many. And on the other hand, deep experience of religious realities, prayer, meditation, spirituality, is stirring ever-growing numbers of people.

There are some recent historical dimensions to these trends. First, a very clear call has been coming to Catholics in the past ten to fifteen years, the call to action on behalf of social justice. For one thing, this call comes as a result of deepening insight into the biblical concept of the Kingdom of God. This is a kingdom of peace and justice, a kingdom "already here but not yet," which we all have a part in building up. The call also has come in the form of repeated statements in major church documents from John XXIII, Paul VI, the Second Vatican Council, and the 1971 Synod of Bishops. But above all, the call comes most strongly from humankind, our brothers and sisters suffering from structural injustices and oppressions in our own country and around the globe.

Response to this call has been lively and strong in recent years. And yet for many, has not commitment to action for social justice frequently appeared to con-

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flict with commitment to prayer and spirituality? So it seemed during the decade of the 1960s, a period of intense social action. In the United States, civil rights and peace activities tended to take up the physical and psychic energies of many of the most explicitly committed Catholics, lay, religious and clerical. This was occurring at the same time that traditional forms of piety were being fractured by the changes of the Council. Moreover, the theology of secularization was challenging notions of a distinct spirituality, and prayer in the Secular City became "being where the action is at." Many social activists, wearied by disappointments and failures in their efforts, became discouraged or cynical. The life of the spirit often was dry in the community of activists.

Thus a very understandable reaction has set in during recent years. The early 1970s in this country have been marked by what Peter Steinfels, writing in *Commonweal* a year and a half ago, called the "new interiorism" (April 27, 1973). This has meant a general mood of inwardness and self-examination, a re-emphasis on the traditional religious symbols, and a search for a deeper inner strength and personally rich vision of reality. This "new interiorism" has meant for many, whether religious professionals or lay-persons, a significant shift in priorities. No longer are institutional change, political reform and structural renewal high on the list of many who might have engaged in these activities a few years ago.

The renewal programs going on in many religious communities—including directed retreats, houses of prayer, spiritual counselors, discernment workshops—are one set of manifestations of this new emphasis on matters of the spirit. Certainly the growing charismatic movement in the American Catholic community offers another strong sign of search for interior renewal. Yet both of these movements, it seems to me, have a marked tendency to be *a-political*, *a-social* in their orientation. By this I mean a tendency to focus on personal renewal or one-to-one charity without attending to the socio-economic injustices which mark our society structurally. It appears that for many persons an increased involvement in prayer groups, religious community renewal, etc., results in removal from much of the swirl of the social turmoil around them, or at least does not impel them into action for justice.

I am not saying that the obvious breath of the Spirit blowing today in the church in this country is to be disdained. But I really do question whether the movement toward religious experience has been insufficiently grasped by some of us, with the unfortunate result of a social insensitivity, a lack of commitment to structural change for social justice. We should be very wary of this. The movement toward love of God of necessity involves the love of our brother and sister (1 John 4:21) and love, in the words of the 1971 Synod, "implies an absolute demand for justice."

Thus it is critical to ask whether we American Catholics are cultivating a faith which can relate to the radical social challenges coming upon us in the immediate future. It is not overly dramatic or rhetorical to assert that the United States will face some profound political, social and economic upheavals before the end of this century. Our place in the world—"Number One," as a recent President liked to remind us—is being increasingly challenged not only on pragmatic political grounds but on serious moral grounds. What will be the human meaning of our affluent lifestyle in a world where millions are starving to death? The impact of inflation promises to precipitate severe economic dislocations at home, with potential for frightening political consequences. The ability of our governmental system and traditional institutions to meet these challenges is at least not to be accepted as inevitable. The call to work for structural change for justice becomes more and more imperative.

Integration

What is increasingly needed, it seems to me, is a faith perspective which *integrates* religious experience and social involvement. This "integral faith" will not mean a substitution of action for prayer, but neither will it allow for a spirituality which avoids commitment to justice. Hopefully, it will be a "faith with works" which is truly alive.

The faith perspective I am speaking of has to relate to some of the contradictions experienced in our contemporary Catholic community. These contradictions undercut effective Christian life. They are tensions which, if allowed to go unrelieved, destroy credibility. Mention of four of these contradictions will throw light on some of the dimensions of an integral faith.

1. *Social morality takes second place to individual morality.* It has become increasingly evident that our traditional catechesis in the formation of conscience has been seriously deficient. We have been well trained in the categories of personal responsibility and personal sin, but find it difficult to grasp the meaning and implications of social responsibility and social sin.

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Recently I picked up a widely used hand missal (they *do* still exist and *are* widely used!) and was pleased to note an excellent and up-to-date explanation of the Sacrament of Penance. It briefly emphasized the best in both sacramental theology and sound psychology. But I was surprised to see that this fine explanation was followed by an "examination of conscience" of the sort which focused entirely on individual morality. Missing Mass, disobedience to those in authority, failings in chastity (of many different varieties), anger within one's own family: these and other personal sins were proposed as the subject for examination. Not even a hint was given of *social sin*—the existence of structural injustice and our own involvement in its continuance.

Racism in the institutions of American society, economic hardships imposed on the poor in this country and in the Third World because of inequitable business practices, waste of scarce global resources through affluent consumption patterns, dominance of the powerless through political manipulation, the increasing danger of annihilation because of the arms race: these are evils just as real in our world as marital infidelity or dishonesty in speech. These are social sins wh.ch involve persons in terms of responsibility; any morality based on responsibility must take them into account.

A faith which satisfies itself on the level of personal morality is simply truncated and unreal in today's world. It contributes nothing to a mature person's ability to relate to a world where justice is the major issue in human affairs. Social responsibility—which implies an appreciation of and relationship to the structural and institutional aspects of reality—must be central to an integral faith.

2. *Social problems are not adequately perceived.* Closely related to a lack of understanding of social morality is the failure to perceive the structural complexity of social problems. Such a failure is in a way more serious than simply not caring about the injustices and oppressions of our contemporary world. In fact, it frequently can coexist with a very strong concern for social justice, a deeply felt moral responsibility for social change. But the difficulty is not one of moralism but of perception. I simply do not *see* the reality of structural injustice. Thus no matter how much I may profess my moral commitment to better the lot of the poor, unless I perceive the operation and impact of certain economic systems which make it impossible for the poor (individuals or nations) to control their own destiny, I merely am moralistic and not political—that is, I am not effective in bringing change.

Perception is basically a matter of *mindset*, of the controlling vision we have of "the way things are." This vision embodies values and is prior to our judgment of what we should do morally in any particular situation. As a controlling vision, it must be examined before we can adequately understand why some people—morally good and socially concerned—simply lack any insight into the components of social problems around us.

For example, for most Americans, "efficiency," "success," "measurability," "productivity," are elements of our mindset. We tend to judge persons and situations in terms of these values. This might help to explain the instance of the failure of many American Catholics to understand the significance of the current struggle to organize marginal workers in this country, many of whom are engaged in the agricultural sector. I may moralistically profess, and be genuinely committed to, the rights of workers to unionize. (This is really not such a radical position, after all, since Leo XIII emphasized just such a right back in 1891.) But until I perceive the problem of a laborers' organization such as the United Farmworkers in terms other than simply efficiency and productivity, I may never grasp the relevancy of support for seemingly unsophisticated causes like boycotts of lettuce and grapes. The plight of the farmworkers must be perceived as the structural problem that it is, related to wider issues such as corporate agri-business.

Integral faith, today, then, must include a critical consciousness of our own mindsets. Without this, we are subject to whatever cultural biases we have been socialized to, and are in danger of blindness to the full dimensions of the social reality we are called to respond to.

3. *Church statements are not put into practice.* In recent years there has been no area of church teaching so repeatedly emphasized in major statements and documents as the call to act for social justice. Papal encyclicals, letters of national hierarchies, documents from the Council and the Synods: all have reiterated the message of the Christian's obligation to be involved in the great tasks of peace, justice and development. And although the statements tend to maintain a rather general level of abstraction, nevertheless they have been quite specific at times in making judgments on current socio-economic practices and in recommending particular responses by individual Christians and by the church community itself.

Yet it often appears that the church's social teachings remain merely words on paper. We seldom hear them spoken of in Sunday homilies—the only real occasion that the majority of American Catholics have to receive any religious instruction. Catholic educational institutions, spoken of so highly in other church pronouncements, pay surprisingly little attention to communicating this social message. Even more puzzling and disturbing, however, is the failure to put into practice this message.

The 1971 Synod statement, "Justice in the World," provides a case in point. The bishops of the Synod made a strong remark to the effect that those who

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would speak justice to others must first be just themselves. They then called on the church to examine its own practice of justice in how it treated others, how it held property, and what its lifestyle manifested. Very pointed remarks were made, for example, about the treatment of women and about the identification of the church with the rich and the powerful. But we American Catholics are understandably confused when we fail to see the working out of these statements in practice. Women remain second-class citizens in our church—in many other areas besides the better-known one of ordination. And episcopal residences and clerical lifestyles have by-and-large not been appreciably modified.

Gaps between teaching and practice strain credibility. A community which would promote integral faith must of necessity strive to narrow those gaps. Paulo Freire has spoken of the "alienated and alienating blah" of words which lack any action component. The phenomenon of many good people giving up on the church appears to be disturbing evidence of this alienation. An integral faith takes seriously the nexus between word and deed.

4. *Values are not supported by structures.* A value, whether individual or social, cannot be disembodied if it is to be effective in the real world. To become operational, to have an impact, it must be supported in the processes, institutions and structures of society. What many Catholics in the United States have felt in recent years, however, is that the values inculcated by their church do not in fact find support in the surrounding social structures. For example, one of the great difficulties of living out Christian family values in this country is the fact that children are very costly, abortion is now legal, and divorce is increasingly common. Another example: the value of simplicity in wants, a safeguard against an enslaving materialism as well as an effort at greater sharing of the earth's goods, is in conflict with the structural emphases on consumption and competition.

However wise or unwise is the effort of some American Catholics to support a specific constitutional amendment to forbid abortions (I personally would judge it to be unwise), such a movement does indicate a recognition of the key significance of political and legal structures. The value of life protected before birth is less than effective if the structures of society do not support that value. It appears to me that Catholics are coming to appreciate the importance of social structures and the fact that these structures are not value-free. What this means in a pluralistic society, in working out the details relating to structures supportive of particular values, is neither clear nor easy. But at least we may more readily be inclined to acknowledge that for the values of justice to be realized in our society, we must work to change unjust structures.

An integral faith, therefore, sees the necessity of making its values real in the social structures which make up our milieu. Just as we incarnate values in structures and institutions, so in turn we are influenced by, socialized to, the values of these structures and institutions. A faith which is alive must be deeply conscious of the significance of the structures of society.

* * *

I have referred frequently in my reflections here to the *structural* aspects of social reality and hence of human existence. These aspects are difficult for most of us to understand and appreciate. Yet the importance of emphasizing social structures when speaking of faith experiences became very clear during the course of the Task Force mentioned at the outset of this article. In an effort to explore the relationship between religious experience and social consciousness, the Center of Concern in Washington, D.C., brought together fourteen persons with varied backgrounds in theology, psychology, spiritual direction, retreat work, social sciences and social action. Meeting several times over a period of six months earlier this year, the Task Force produced a book-length series of articles entitled *Soundings.*

One theme which repeated itself throughout the discussions of the Task Force was that it is only possible to speak of the reality of a human person today by taking into full account the three dimensions of human existence: the *individual*, the *interpersonal*, and the *public.* This triadic framework of human existence has profound implications for the faith life of the Christian.

The *individual* dimension is the realm of the private, the unique. The person is an individual inasmuch as he or she is unique, standing before the Creator in moments of lonely faith. The *interpersonal* dimension, on the other hand, is constituted in the relationships by which one individual deals with another in either the limited sense of an I-Thou encounter or in an extended sense of ordinary social dealings. Here the faith which results in charity is operative. The *public* dimension, however, includes the projections of individual and interpersonal existence into the institutions, structures and processes of society. Faithful response here relates of necessity to the social-political-economic arrangements which are extensions of a person's existence.

Because there is a public dimension to human existence, then, the faith life of the Christian must encompass that dimension. An integral faith, by taking seriously the Christian's relationship to social structures, aims at resolving the contradictions which destroy credibility today. Such a faith perspective emphasizes social morality, perception of structural problems, institutional practice of social teachings and structural support of values. For the contemporary American Catholic, only such an integral faith can link religious experience and social involvement and thereby provide meaning in a time of change.

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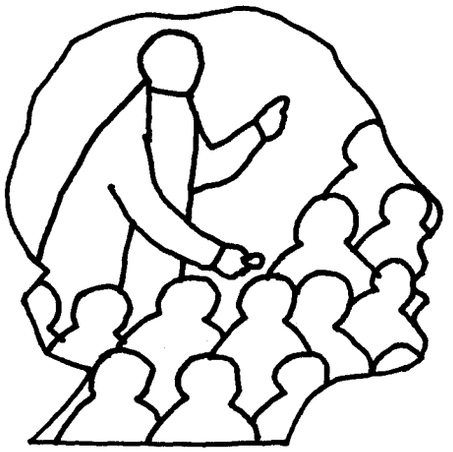

MINISTERING IN TOMORROW'S CHURCH

BERNARD COOKE

Two temptations threaten anyone who wishes to look ahead and suggest the ministries that the Christian community is likely to have, or should have, in the future: there is the danger of asking how the present situation of ministry will be altered (which automatically and unacceptably limits us to our present context of ministry); and there is the danger of projecting abstractly one's own theological or sociological theories without regard for the life forces now at work in Christianity.

After the radical alterations in Christianity in recent decades, no one should be seriously tempted to "foresee" what lies ahead. In particular, the opportunity to share with today's young people their perspective on things religious definitely dispels this temptation: there is no predicting where today's young people will carry our world—and Christianity within it. There is more serious danger that some will attempt *a priori* projections of what authentic and effective ministerial structures should be in tomorrow's Church, instead of allowing ministerial forms (along with all other institutional aspects of Christianity) to emerge organically from the Christian community's living response to the needs and potential of the human situation. Life produces organs appropriate to its needs; this is true also of the life of the Spirit.

However, the life of the Spirit is consciousness and affectivity; it develops organically by insight, understanding and choice; prudential judgment lies at the very heart of this life, and imaginative and critical foresight is a key element in all prudent judgment—even if the judgment be tentative and open-ended. So, there is real purpose in trying to sketch out the kind of Christianity and the kind of ministry we would like to see emerge in the years ahead, grounding that vision in whatever insights we have about the processes of life now emerging in the Church, grounding it also in the understandings about the nature of Christianity that scripture, sacraments and two thousand years of Christian tradition give us, understandings that contemporary scholarship has done so much to clarify. Perhaps the most important purpose of such projection is to give some guidance to our present preparation of Christians for the future, so that in the years ahead we have properly skilled men and women who can successfully midwife the birth of a new Christianity.

For it seems quite certain that this is what is taking place: a new world is being born, and within it a new Christianity. While this process can justifiably be called a "rebirth," since it is the already-existent reality of Christianity that is passing into this new life, we are at one of those points in Christian history when some drastically new life form is coming to be. Whether this will mean the reduction of the Church to "a remnant" of convinced believers, or whether Christians will begin to exist in a *diaspora* situation, we cannot see clearly. The so-called "crisis of faith" through which we are passing, and all the human anguish and tension that accompanies it, can quite accurately be viewed as the birth pangs of this new Christianity; and the very pain can symptomatically give us some limited insight into that which is emerging and into the ministrations it will require.

Whatever else the Church of the future will be, it will necessarily be a community of believers, a sharing of faith in the risen Christ. But having said this, a host of question remains: what kind of faith? what manner of community? what do we mean by "risen Christ"? And these questions are inseparable; what faith will mean in the future depends on the evolution of our Christology. What will it mean for Christians in years ahead to believe that Jesus is "the incarnate Word"? what will it mean for them to believe that he is present to them in the Church and in the world? to believe that he is our savior?

Already we know from our own experience that the day of "cheap faith" is over and gone. The relatively undemanding membership in a religious group that asked for nothing more than a formal acquiescence to doctrines and practices has been unmasked as "imitation faith." Even the simple, unquestioning religious submission that accepted as true everything that came by way of authoritative teaching has failed to measure up as mature

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Christian faith. In theory we have recovered the understanding that Christian faith means a personal acceptance of the risen Lord, with all the practical implications of such personal relatedness—and that the conscious sharing of such acceptance is what we mean by Christian community. But a frightening chasm separates that theoretical knowledge from the reality of what goes on in institutionalized religion.

In any period of history such personal faith is demanding; today it has particular demands. It cannot ignore any of the probing questions raised by those who have sincerely been searching for the "reality" of God and of his revelation in Jesus of Nazareth. Nor can it ignore any of the modern insights into the deeper aspects of the human person, into the historical and therefore relative character of all human knowing, into the limited and distorting tendency of human language. Faith today and in the future will have to be a critical, questioning, even somewhat doubt-filled but trusting acceptance of the risen Christ's presence in the sacramentalities of the Christian community—and beyond that in the sacramentalities of human life. Community in faith must be a union of persons who commit themselves to the principle that love, human but reaching out to embrace the divine, can overcome evil; and who then translate that belief into the grey-area decisions of human experience and social existence.

Today we know enough about the extension of the kingdom of God into the entirety of human life (though our ignorance is still immense) to know that we must admit and cherish some kind of community, even in faith, with all men and women who honestly face life with love. Our Christian faith must forego its classic claims to monopoly on revelation and on charity. We must face fearlessly the mounting evidence that somehow the different paths of religious reflection, such as the contemplative traditions of the Far East that are only now becoming known to us, lead to the same transcendent divinity whom we know as the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Yet, we must simultaneously search for some honest explanation of the unparalleled importance of Jesus of Nazareth, and attempt with less naiveté to situate his redeeming role in the evolution of mankind.

Even this hasty mention of the path that Christian faith is already taking, and to be true to itself must continue to take, makes it clear that the *ministry of teaching* must assume new proportions and find new orientations. Without in any way relinquishing the concrete personal witness to Christ that the Christian teacher shares with the prophet and the preacher, religious education must be sophisticated and thoroughly "with it." No genuine advance in human knowledge can be overlooked; Christian understanding must be uncompromisingly pluralistic (which means "respectful of any truth that anyone possesses") and humble (i.e., open to moving wherever the evidence of truth suggests).

Clearly, authoritarian teaching, with its inevitable and over-simplified insistence on one particular formulation, cannot deal satisfactorily with such pluralism in understanding and in faith itself. Moreover, imposed "teaching" cannot possibly achieve that interiorization of faith understanding which tomorrow's Christians will need. Yesterday's and today's Christians also needed such truly internal knowledge, but until very recently it was more possible to rely upon adherence to some official translation of faith into specific laws. Now, however, we have irreversibly moved into a situation where only individual moral judgment, made in a given set of circumstances, can possibly express Christian faith in appropriate decision; and where, as a result, the task of *forming Christian conscience* looms as one of the principal ministries to be developed.

For centuries the need of spiritual direction has been recognized, if persons were to acquire accurate and profound religious insights through contemplation, and if balanced and innovative decisions about life were to be made. Yet, this has been a need recognized just for the privileged few who "had a vocation to the religious life"; and even here the need was one that was for the most part recognized but not filled. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same situation has existed in religious contexts other than Christianity. Today, if we are to face realistically the potential and demands of the future, there is a basic need to provide the kind of sensitive and theologically-formed spiritual direction that can guide men and women, through their years of growth and into adult life, towards the capacity to grasp personally the meaning of their faith and to inject that understanding into the pragmatic decisions of their lives. Such a ministry must draw upon accurate teaching; it must often presuppose competent psychological counseling; but it is distinct from both of these: it is the guidance of persons as they develop the art of making authentically Christian judgments about practical courses of action. In justice, we cannot deny such spiritual direction to anyone in the Christian community, according to their capacity to profit by it—and, of course, we must avoid the gnostic judgment that most persons are incapable!

While it will function as part of a more complex effort, *preaching* will certainly be a major component in such formation of conscience, unless we are to provide such formation only to some elite group—and so foster a new clericalism. This says something about the qualitative changes needed in the preaching ministry: it must bring accurate understandings of Christian tradition and of contemporary human life into creative confrontation; it must touch upon the imagery and mythology that underlie people's individual and corporate consciousness and motivations, and challenge them by "the Christ-myth;" it must foster responsibility and freedom and vision and hope, for these are the sources of the decisive-

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ness that is proper to Christian faith; in short, it must lead men and women to hear the word of God that is being spoken to them in the totality of their human experience. Given the wide range of persons to whom such preaching would be addressed, and the wide range therefore of "adaptation" to such pluralism, it does not seem likely that effective preaching can be confined to some clerical group; rather, it would be exercised in quite different fashion by men and women specially equipped to preach to a given audience, either within liturgy or in other contexts.

To speak of this widened context for preaching is to draw attention to just one facet of the radical changes needed in tomorrow's Christian ministry. It is a truism that community springs from communication; actually, whatever kind of communication is proper to a given group is "community" in its dynamic (rather than structural) sense. So, the only way of fostering community in any given situation is to nurture the appropriate process of communication. Yet—and this dramatizes the "newness" of our present situation—one of the most basic and far-reaching forces that is bringing a "new world" into being is the revolution in human communication. With communication in general taking new forms, Christianity must discover anew how to minister to more profound and more genuine communication of faith from one Christian to another. Means that in another historical setting might have been effective in achieving basic consensus of Christian understanding could well be outmoded and counter-productive in tomorrow's Church—indeed, there is good evidence that such has been the case for some time now.

Probably the place where new forms of ministry will be most noticed will be in sacramental liturgy, since Christians have been conditioned to equate "minister" with "liturgical leader." At the root of whatever *liturgical ministry* does evolve will lie tomorrow's need for sacramental actions that are much more humanly perceptible and intelligently experienced. There is no hope for the kind of mature faith that both Christianity and mankind's needs demand, no hope for anything that deserves the name "Christian community," unless there is a liturgy that can genuinely express and nurture such faith. Tomorrow's liturgy must celebrate the Christian dimension of a given community's secularity: as the recognition of the intrinsic secularity of Christianity grows, Christian worship will be seen as that total life response to the Gospel that comes to focus in a community acknowledgment of God's word in Christ. Christian Eucharist will bring to fuller statement that word which is spoken sacramentally in Christian men's and women's whole life experience, and beyond that the word spoken by all human life.

For liturgy to have this kind of close relationship to people's consciousness and daily activity, it will have to be much more human, carried on (at least for the most part) in smaller community groupings, open to rather wide diversification in its details. Which means that the liturgical leader will have the complicated function of guiding into a coherent activity the distinctive understandings and outlooks and experiences and "faith postures" of the men and women who comprise a given worship community. But the unifying function of the sacramental leader is not only "organizational"; in the deepest sense it is sacramental, because the celebrant "summarizes" in his public profession of faith the faith of the assembled group. It is hard to see how such integral sacramentalizing of the community (or for that matter, of the divine action) can take place unless both men and women function as celebrant, so that the full scope of human experience find symbolic statement. God is imaged, i.e., worshipped, by the dialectic of human experience, not by any single pattern; and scripture singles out the man/woman dialectic as specially revelatory of the divine—"in his own image he created mankind; man and woman he created them." What new significance will flow from the Eucharist (and other Sacraments) when the full symbolism of woman comes into play we do not know; all we know now with some certainty is that until now we have a truncated word about God's saving love.

Admitting women to full equality in the ministerial life of the Church will be but one of the sociological changes required if the Christian community is to attain more mature communication in a vision of "the human." Acceptance of full freedom and equality will mean the abolition of divisions between "lay" and "cleric," between rich and poor, between "establishment" and "people." In other words, one of the principal ministerial tasks of the Church of the future is that of widespread *reconciliation*—within the Church, but not confined to it, since the alienations within the Christian community are part of the basic social maladjustment of our world. While this ministry will involve a fundamental recasting of the Sacrament of Penance (simply changing its name to Sacrament of Reconciliation will accomplish very little), it will reach much further: it must be rooted in a basic alteration of our religious understandings. Truly to reconcile persons with one another in the Church we need an understanding of God neither as masculine, nor as the protector of the privileged classes, nor as one who works through a clerical caste.

In the Church's relation to "the world"—for the sake of whose transformation into the kingdom of God the Church exists—a number of important areas of reconciliation demand ministration. There is the long-standing and unacceptable alienation of most contemporary thought from Christianity; there is the alienation of the masses of the world's poor from a Church that still projects the image of an ally of the powerful; there is the alienation of the Church, at least in much of its official posture, from the agonizing questions and prob-

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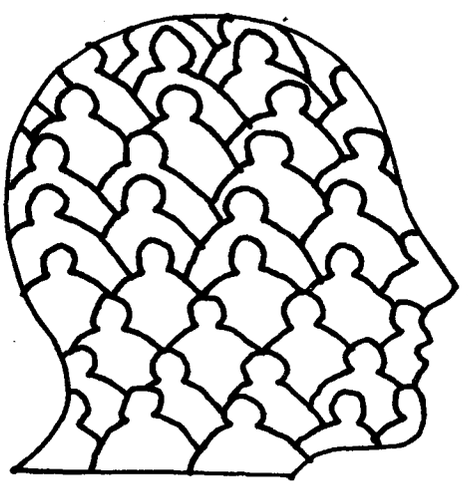
lems of most thoughtful men and women—the Church still issues triumphalist claims to much more certainty about life's meaning and fulfillment than it really possesses; there is the alienation of the Church from the indigenous cultures to which Christians belong in various places, an alienation that is felt most symptomatically in sacramental liturgy. Such alienations constitute an almost impenetrable barrier to the hearing of the Gospel, because they negate the basic meaning of the Incarnation.

Perhaps it seems that the changes in Christian ministry that we suggest are being dictated by a movement towards the secularizing of religion. To some extent this is true: one of the positive elements in our present change in values is a recovered esteem of the "material" and the "bodily"; and unquestionably this is having an impact on our Christian attitudes, probably most obviously in our more candid and open approach to human sexuality. It might be good to recall, however, that denigration of any portion of creation (referring to it as "secular" in a pejorative sense) has never been consistent with Christian revelation, and that exaltation of the "spiritual" at the expense of the body has been a denial of the basic thrust of Christianity.

However, something more basic and religiously more important than a recovery of balance in assessing the "human" (important though that is!) is at work. What is at work is a developing insight that the sensible reality that enters into our daily experience is intrinsically sacramental of the divine presence; it is truly "word of God." The world we experience (especially people) is a profound symbol of the divine; but a symbol in the richest sense, i.e., a sacrament, which implies the coincidence of symbol and symbolized, the presence of that God about whom his creation speaks.

How in detail such a *ministry to the sacramentalisms of human life* is to be structured, we cannot predict; for that matter, we cannot foresee too sharply the future shape of any of the other ministries we have mentioned. That a multiplicity of ministries (rather than one all-embracing "pastoral ministry") will be needed is rather clear; such a multiplicity is already coming into existence. It also seems quite clear that jurisdictionally-grounded ministry, as we have known it for many centuries, is incapable of ministering to the needs of tomorrow's Christianity. This should not frighten us, for jurisdiction was never that appropriate a ground of effective ministry. Now, as painful experience has taught us that one cannot legislate a deepened faith in Christ, nor a better understanding of God, nor genuine liturgy, nor true Christian love, we may develop patterns of ministry that are dictated by the needs of the Christian community as it seeks to fulfill its historical destiny.



Reconciliation in the post-ecumenical age

FAITH AFTER AUSCHWITZ — AND BELFAST

GREGORY BAUM

Today Christians demand that their faith make sense to them. By this I do not mean that they are looking for an apologetics defending the rational credibility of the gospel. I do not think that today's Christians are interested in proofs for the existence of God. What has become important to Christians is, I think, that the gospel message shed light on their daily life, on the issues that actually trouble society, on the problems posed to people by history itself. Christians find it increasingly difficult to believe if the message preached to them refers to a reality apart from and unrelated to their experience of life. They are unable to accept that faith can be equated with believing a system of dogmas that describe a sacred realm apart from life. Faith, we demand, must give meaning to our personal and social existence. This does not mean that faith should impose an extrinsic meaning on human history by relating it to what is far away; it means rather that faith should clarify our daily experience, bring to light the hidden meaning of it, and reveal the gracious presence of God operative in our history.

Many Christians today also demand that their faith relate them to people everywhere. We find it impossible to believe a message if it locks us into the small circle of

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our own concerns and fails to link us to the suffering and the aspirations of the wider community. More than that, we find it impossible to believe if the message itself becomes a source of discrimination, We have become so aware of the damage done by confessional strife and the expression of dogmatism that we refuse to move in this direction. Christian faith has for us an ecumenical dimension. Belfast has become a sad and troubling symbol in the Christian world. For while the social injustices in Northern Ireland and the protests of the Catholic minority have as such nothing to do with religion, the confessional strife has intensified the political conflict on both sides and removed from people the common sense that enables them, after having struggled for justice, to begin negotiations whenever a good opportunity arises. In Northern Ireland religion has sanctified the conflict and stirred up the deepest passions. The suffering of the people of Belfast reveals the struggle for power and the contempt for humanity present in confessional strife.

Today we can believe only if the Christian message makes us more open to others, summons us to join with others in the struggle against injustice, and creates in us a longing for the ultimate reconciliation of mankind. Christian faith has a global dimension. If the Christian creed separates us in principle from the followers of other religions, we can no longer believe. In particular, it means for many of us that we cannot be Christian believers if this prevents us from recognizing Judaism as an authentic religion. If we still have to believe—as Christian literature tells us from the beginning—that the Jews are blind, that they are caught in darkness, that they have no place before God, that their entire dignity lies in their destiny to become Christians, then faith loses its meaning for us. After the extermination of the six million, we cannot endorse a religion that negates Jewish existence. We realize of course that Christianity is not responsible for Auschwitz. At the same time, we also know that without the Church's age-old symbolism depicting the Jews as a blind, carnal and evil people, the enemy of God and mankind, Hitler would not have been able to make the Jews the scapegoat of his political paranoia. Hitler's insanity was grafted on an antecedent, more universal illness. Since then, Christians have become aware how easily the affirmation of the gospel implies the suppression of other people and how the love of truth can have built into it the hatred of others. If we are believers today, then our faith must leave room for the world religions and other wisdom traditions, and enable us to cooperate with other communities in the struggle against the evil forces that devour and deform human life on this globe.

Some readers may react strongly against these reflections. What right do we have to put conditions on the Christians' faith? Must we not accept God's Word whatever its content, especially if it appears in contradiction to a purely human wisdom? If we make demands on Christian faith, do we not submit God's Word to human reason and undermine the very nature of faith? My reply to these objections is that the above-mentioned demands on faith—that it make sense and that it be an instrument of reconciliation—are made by Christians as a result of a long spiritual journey. We remember a time when we did not put these conditions on the life of faith. Since then something has happened to us: we have confronted the evil in the world more courageously, we have had new religious experiences, we have reread the scriptures and reflected anew on our tradition. And hence we can no longer believe in a message that remains extrinsic to life itself and that negates the existence of other religions. The demands we make on faith are neither arbitrary nor rationalistic; they are the fruit of Christian experience, they are theological. In more technical language, we have come to see that the divine truth revealed in Jesus is truth of a special kind; it is salvational truth. The gospel transforms life by healing it and promotes life by reconciling people.

These brief remarks on the exigencies of faith after Auschwitz and after Belfast, recall Karl Rahner's theological position that God graciously creates in us the question long before he offers us an answer and that this vital question is already a means of redemption. For living out of this question we are on the way of salvation, even if we never find the answer. Why is this so? Because the true question delivers us from superficial questions and false perspectives. According to this position, then, God saves us by the quest of faith even if we never hear the voice that removes all our doubts and settles our restlessness.

If we list Christian doctrines in the customary way, following a particular creed or a traditional theological system, it is difficult to recognize in them the saving truth that gives meaning to life and reconciles the human family. If this is the only kind of preaching we hear and the only kind of teaching to which we are exposed, then it is very difficult to be a believer. Contemporary theologians, such as Karl Rahner, have tried to formulate appropriate creeds for our times. Since I do not wish to deal with this question in a general way here, let me indicate in a few paragraphs how I hear the Christian message and what I believe—after Auschwitz and the crimes of this century. Let me add that what I

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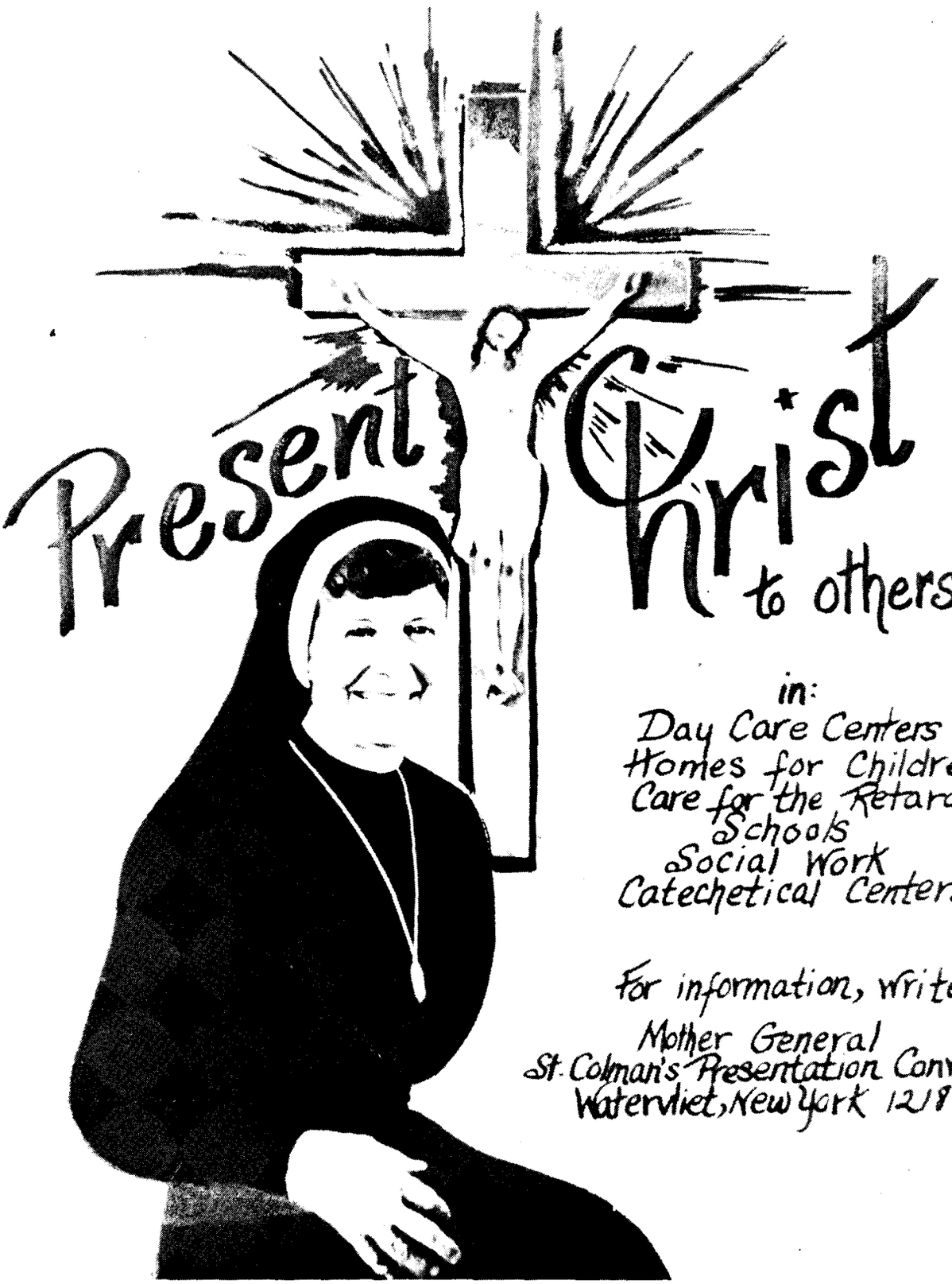

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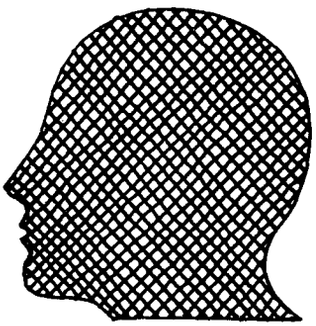
call "my faith" does not simply feel like my own: it feels, rather, like a participation in the faith of an historical community under the pressure of the present.

Let me begin with the negative symbols of the biblical message. Because the world inflicts so much damage on human life, we must start with reflection on sin. We are keenly aware of the genocides, the wars, the sustained exploitations proper to our age and remember the history of evil that has preceded us. We are in need of a critical language, a language that clearly brings out, and negates, the forces of evil. This language we actually find in the Bible. For we read of the slavery in which Israel lived in the land of bondage before it was delivered by God. We hear of the affliction imposed upon people by ambitious and power-hungry rulers. The prophets reveal to us the nature of sin: sin as personal transgression and sin as collective blindness and group-egotism. And the story of Jesus reveals the various forms of human sin, especially people's resistance to the truth—the unwillingness to come to self-knowledge and to renounce power and privilege. Jesus preached against legalism, clericalism and parochialism as the structures of evil that destroy authentic and life-giving religion and oppose the work of the Spirit.

Christian teaching, then, is rich in negative symbols. These open our eyes to reality and prevent us from believing the superficial glance at the world that may reveal a peaceful and prosperous land. The ancient symbol of original sin reminds us that the little innocent baby is born into a sinful world and becomes the heir of the deforming influences operative in the community. We impose on the growing child the money- and achievement-orientation of our society, the hidden and not-so-hidden racism, the individualism and elitism of Western culture. Born into sin, we learn to participate in the structures of domination. The Christian symbols open our eyes to this dark side of reality which only too often we refuse to acknowledge.

But this is not the whole story of human life. The scriptures also provide us with the symbols that disclose divine salvation operative in our history, personal and social. God offers redemption to an enslaved Israel. The covenant reveals the mercy of God to all the oppressed. The prophetic preaching makes known to us that evil is not the only power: for the divine promises accompany the people on their way and determine their historical destiny. Men and women, wherever they may be, are not left in bondage to principalities and powers: they are called and empowered by God to create forms of life that correspond to the divine will. In Jesus we have the final manifestation of God's victory over evil. He, not Adam, is the key for the understanding of human life. Wherever people are they are caught in a world of sin: but where sin abounds, grace abounds even more. People are summoned and strengthened by God, operative in their lives, to move forward to freedom, justice and peace. The dominion of God over the powers of darkness, promised in the scriptures, has revealed its features in the preaching and the life of Jesus, is made available to us in the community of Jesus where the Spirit dwells, and is pressing in upon human history through the Spirit operating within it, making us long for the liberation of mankind. This is the Kingdom of God in which I believe.

Combining these two sets of symbols, we recognize that the gospel is both judgment on us and power unto new life. It gives meaning to our lives in the sense that it makes us see both our personal struggle and the wider social development as part of a great drama of redemption, in which God operating from within history frees us to assume ever more responsibility for our future and empowers us to overcome the obstacles to love and peace. Even when we are destroyed, we want to believe that this is not the end, that in Jesus the definitive victory has been revealed, that God will have the final and last word. The gospel also reveals to us that other people, whatever their cultural and religious tradition, are participating in the same drama: for they too are caught in sin, summoned by the divine call present in their lives, and empowered to recognize the structures of evil in their midst and transcend them within their own traditions. In this context we recall a beautiful sentence from Vatican II: "Since Christ died for all men, and since



the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every person the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). Making the Kingdom the central symbol governing our understanding of history, we remain open to other people, rejoice with them in the wisdom found in their own traditions, join them in a common struggle against the dehumanizing forces, and trust that God's victory is pressing in upon all of us.

I suppose that this summarizes how I hear the Christian message and what I believe. The preceding account. brief though it be, can be expressed in the church's traditional christological and trinitarian creed. For in the man Jesus, God reveals to us not only what it means to be truly human but also what the mystery of God is like: Jesus is God's Word addressed to us, in Jesus God communicates himself to us, the man Jesus

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is the Word made flesh. What Jesus has revealed, moreover, is that the divine mystery is present to life in a threefold way: God has been present as Word from the beginning of history addressing humanity in a hidden way; God is present in the lives of people as Spirit empowering them to respond to the Word and become creative; and finally God is the matrix out of which we come to be and the horizon toward which we move, the Alpha and Omega. In the trinitarian language of the Fourth Gospel, God is Light, Life and Love.

In the preceding paragraphs I have summarized what I believe in terms of the traditional Christian symbols and then indicated that it is possible to translate this symbolic language into the more conceptual language of the church's defined teaching. I must confess that unless I am able to translate doctrines and creedal formulas back into symbols shedding light on human existence and revealing the presence of grace in the midst of an ambiguous world, I do not know what to do with them. Revelation, I have indicated, is not information about a sacred object, but salvational truth: it transforms our awareness of reality, our action, and thus our very being.

What makes faith difficult and sometimes impossible is the overwhelming presence of evil in certain, concrete historical events. In a world such as ours dominated by so many structures of evil and distorted by so much human misery, it is difficult to cling to the scriptural message that God is good, that God is present in life and history as ground of love and principle of salvation. It is often difficult to believe that what happened in Jesus was an irreversible victory of God over the powers of darkness: for the world goes on being so evil. To combine the Christian faith that Jesus is Lord with the acknowledgment of present evil, contemporary theologians have returned to the biblical stress on Christ's second coming. All remains incomplete prior to the Coming. When we call Jesus Lord, we anticipate the final resolution of history. Christian faith in an evil world is often the longing and the hope, grounded on the biblical promises that God will manifest his Kingdom in the liberation of all people.

Can this faith stand up against monumental evil? Can we believe after Auschwitz? I am writing this article after participating in a New York Conference on Theology after the Holocaust. After Auschwitz, Rabbi Irving Greenberg said, there is no room for "untroubled theism." An easy belief in God without confronting the ocean of misery which this God seems to permit is not a truly religious response. We may not always be able to give an affirmative answer to the question whether we believe in God; but even when our affirmations fail us, we realize that we are gripped by the inability to believe precisely because we hope for the Kingdom and are unable to reconcile ourselves with so much evil. There are moments when we have faith and moments

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when we live out of the quest for faith; and both are moments of divine grace.

The reader may have noticed that in summarizing what I believe I did not mention the church except in passing. I said that I believe the Kingdom is anticipated in the community of Jesus, in which the Spirit dwells. The church is the community where Jesus' message is proclaimed and his gifts celebrated. The church is the mediator of the gospel through scripture, teaching, sacraments, liturgy, ministry and communal life; but the church is also the falsifier of the gospel. It is precisely as mediator that the church has the power to distort the gospel and communicate a message to people that does not set them free. Contemporary theologians, I indicated above, have come to lay great stress on the unfinished character of the present redemptive order: all remains incomplete and ambiguous until the final Coming. This eschatological perspective also affects the understanding of church.

Each Christian church carries forward the new life brought by Jesus Christ, but each church also distorts the Christian message. No church can free itself altogether from the ideologies of the culture to which it belongs and from distortions inscribed in its collective life. For this reason it makes no sense to speak of a movement toward Christian unity which is not at the same time a movement of renewal and re-interpretation. If we were to be united as we are now, we may simply pool our shortcomings and disguise even more the meaning of God's act in Jesus Christ. By making the coming Kingdom the governing principle of theology, the church appears to us as the community that serves and anticipates this Kingdom in history and yet stands in need of an ongoing ideological critique.

How, then, are we to understand the Catholic Church's special claim to be the one church of Christ? The official Catholic position on this issue has greatly changed over the centuries, from the definition of Boniface VIII and the Council of Lyons that there is no salvation apart from the Catholic Church and submission to the Roman pontiff, to the declarations of Vatican II that the other Christian churches are truly churches, i.e., communities used by the Spirit to save and sanctify people, and secondly, that the whole of humanity is the locus of divine grace. How did Vatican II understand the special Catholic claim to uniqueness in this altered context? The theology proposed in the conciliar documents was that while all the churches enjoy gifts of Christ, in the Catholic Church these gifts exist in fullness. Today, after the new eschatological stress and the greater awareness of the incompleteness of the present order, we hesitate to claim completeness for the church, for any church. Prior to the final coming, the ambiguity remains. What then does the special Catholic claim mean in this new theological context?

Catholics rejoice in the greatness of the Catholic tradi-

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tion, but they also appreciate the greatness of the other Christian churches. They want to retain their confessional loyalty while totally repudiating the sectarian spirit. Is this possible? Such Catholics interpret the Catholic Church's claim to uniqueness not in reliance on special divine promises that supposedly make this church more faithful to the gospel than any other, but as an expression of its historical self-understanding. For the Catholic Church is the church of the West with the institutionally unbroken history; the Mother Church from which the churches of the Reformation have sprung; the church that has preserved with the other Catholic churches a sense of communality and sacramentality; the church that is open to new cultures sometimes to the point of syncretism and remains to this day a transnational and transcultural ecclesiastical community. The typically Catholic distortions of the gospel, especially through the ill-fated patrimony of authoritarianism, are also related to this remarkable history. The special Catholic claims, then, are not statements of faith: they simply express our unparalleled history, summarize our collective aspirations, and describe the specific character of our failings. (The Catholic Church, One and Holy, proclaimed in the creed, refers to what the Christian community is meant to be and destined to be in the perspective of the Kingdom.)

I would not have written the preceding paragraph a few years ago. But I have come to see that if an administrative and ministerial church regards itself as part of what is to be believed (objectum fidei), then it easily becomes an obstacle to the faith of vast numbers of Christians and, more gravely still, it finds it almost impossible to come to self-knowledge and submit its institutional life to an ongoing critique. Church leaders who regard the church as divine become defensive: while they readily admit their own personal shortcomings, they feel that they have to defend the image of the church and its traditional institutions. They are unwilling, in other words, to review the church's collective life in the light of the Christian message. The church is witness and minister of faith when it proclaims the Word of God and is willing to submit its own collective and institutional life to the gospel.

Christian faith in the present age is in search of a new language. We affirm the coming of God's Kingdom and the irreversible turning point in Jesus Christ, but we hold this message in such a way that room is left for the world religions and in particular for the living reality of Judaism. We hold the Christian message in such a way that room is left for several Christian traditions. We repudiate confessional strife. What counts for us is whether people, especially believing people, are willing to be in conversation with us to discern with us the evil forces that devour and destroy human life, cooperate with us and hope with us for the ultimate victory of God over all the enemies of life.

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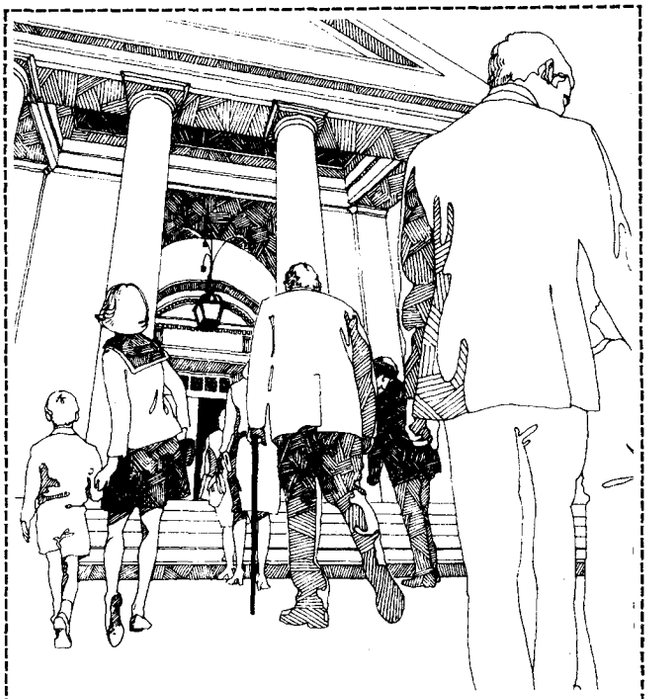

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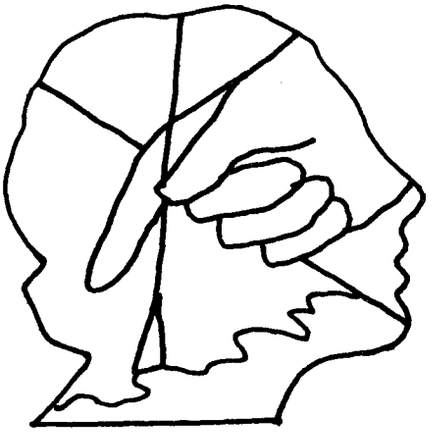

'Christ came swaddled with darkness'

CULTURE AND THE FUTURE OF BELIEF

CLAIRE HAHN

CULTURE and belief, their interrelationship and interdependence, have been concerns engaging the periphery of my attention for many years, and since this *Commonweal* assignment, the immediate foreground for at least two months. The editors focus the problem in the following paragraph:

"Faith usually expresses itself in art — in architecture, painting and music as well as in literature. Both faith and art nurture one another and both are impoverished when the relationship between the two is weak. It can be argued that the flowering of the arts associated with religious faith depends on a strong cultural consensus and a sense of shared belief within the institutional Church and that, now that this consensus has been broken down, those who look to art, music and literature for cultural symbols that will reinforce their faith will find only sterility, amateurism, pop-art and nostalgia. How can faith continue to find a cultural expression if the cultural consensus that once supported it has broken down? If it can't, what effect will this have on the quality of our belief?"

To come to terms with these questions necessitates definitions and assumptions which may seem very much like presumptions because space demands ellipsis. However, I assume that the most recent of newspaper headlines will give supporting evidence to my contention that the condition of the society in which we live is one of radical dissolution and uncontrollable variety. Inevitably then, in such a world, faith and culture are heterogeneous; there can be no theonomous analysis of culture. In our time the ground of culture is not formal religion, nor has it been since the Medieval age. The man of faith lives in a secular world. How then, and in what, does he continue to believe?

Certainly most thinking Christians have been pressured into a sophistication which is less a simplistic trust in the institutional Church "It" than a longing for the *Kairos* of the Church "She," that loving Mother who gives form to their deepest spiritual needs. Their faith is coming closer to Niebuhr's definition of the term, "the concern for ultimate value" than to dependence on dogma. It follows then that their faith is dynamic, for as they posit ultimate value, they recognize that it has not as yet been realized; as they intuit a perfection to be, their dissatisfaction with the temporal manifestations of the Church are not permanently alienating. Their values are relative only in terms of their certainty of a transcendent, existing value. Such Christians are not afraid of doubt or change because, although the Word was spoken into the world at one particular moment in time, its meaning is revealed in process, and their questions are part of that process.

These Christians do not so much look for support from their culture as they experience the need to interact with and help form the culture of their time. I take culture to be a manifestation of value. In its widest sense it is the total ambiance of a civilization. More particularly, and in the narrow sense in which I wish to use it, the culture of a civilization can be most clearly assessed through its human achievement in art. Rather than having their faith reinforced by contemporary art, Christians will find their doubts reflected in sometimes grotesque halls of mirrors. They will be challenged, confronted and affronted. I am, of course, taking it for granted that these concerned persons will have the taste to distinguish between junk and art. They will not be seduced by the religious pornography of something like "The Exorcist," nor think that the academy award makes an entertainment like "The Sting" a great film (although they might be moved to consider the revival of Scott Joplin's music significant of cultural value). They will know that Rod McKuen doesn't write poetry. They will, in other words, be alert to discern the creative work from the cheaply synthetic exploitation. And, as they respect the artist's attempt to give form to his value, they will be slow to reject the unfamiliar.

I am convinced that nothing which merits the title "art" can be pornographic and I would go further and say that neither can it be secular. The painter, the sculptor, the writer, contemplates and refuses to do violence to what he sees; he accepts responsibility. What he draws for us is the face of our time. Often, because, as T.S. Eliot has observed, human beings cannot bear very much reality, we turn away in shock. But the timid Christian who refuses to look when an artist bears witness to his vision sees at best through a myopic lens. Great artists such as Yeats and D.H. Lawrence never gave the One they sought a name;

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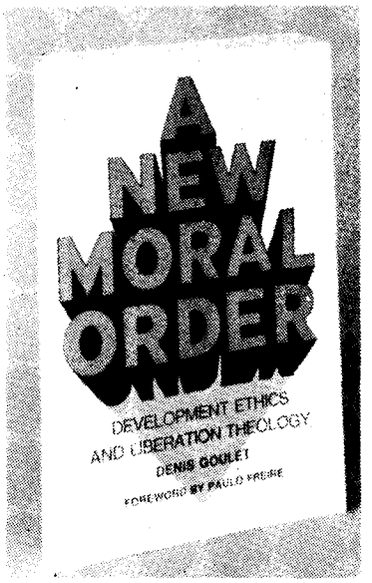
their doctrines were widely divergent, yet each tracked with passionate intensity the *imagines Dei* through the world of persons and things.

The vision of the artist seldom brings comfort and it is a threat as well as a challenge. Withdrawal into a private world is a possible response to the appalling diversity of attitudes towards God and man made visible in modern painting, sculpture, poetry, drama. It was the stance as long ago as Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" where the poet saw that the "Sea of Faith" no longer furled like a bright girdle around earth's shore. Turning in the rejection of despair, Arnold's *persona* says "Ah, love, let us be true/To one another!" Apathy and paralysis of the will before the overwhelming fragmentation of culture and belief is the theme of one of the finest poems in T.S. Eliot's canon, "Gerontion."

Eliot's exploration here of the dilemma of the sophisticated modern Christian is worth examing. As *persona* in the poem, Gerontion is an old man living in a state of spiritual death-in-life. A boy reads to him, evidently heroic tales from history. As Gerontion listens he contemplates all the points at which the passionate past bears no relation to the arid present. Gerontion's "house" is decayed. Rootlessness, material culture, trade, the images of the poem suggest, have taken possession of the house in which humanity is forced to live. Ironically, this world of secular rationalism cries out a phrase from the Gospel, "We would see a sign!" Gerontion's suffering is precipitated by the very certainty of his belief. He knows man demands a miracle and that the one which has given to him, "The word within a word, unable to speak a word,/ Swaddled with darkness," man insistently rejects. He sees the Christian community conducting rituals, holding rites and ceremonials of communion having no connection with sacrament.

Eliot's old man is granted an intensely ironic perception of his situation. He knows that Christ has come but is unable, unwilling to translate his knowledge into saving action. Gerontion then asks the most complex of Christian



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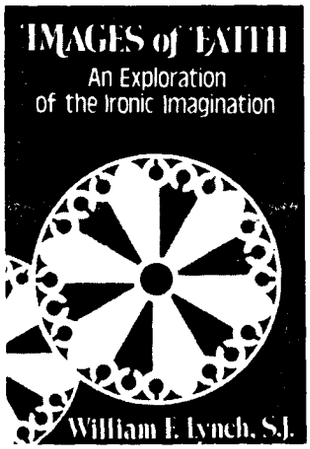

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questions, "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" In his terrible prescience the old man watches images of a disintegrating society whirling to cataclysm. But he is a lost prophet who can neither bear witness to his generation nor stir himself to fight annihilation with personal action. Eliot's Gerontion is falling asleep, dying with the awful knowledge of his true condition burning in his mind.

Eliot sees modern man's rootlessness, his detachment from culture and belief as effecting spiritual paralysis. Gerontion's vice is the capital sin of sloth, a sad reluctance to rouse oneself to perform the actions necessary for salvation. The poet is, of course, offering no philosophical answer to the problem he perceives. "Gerontion" is Eliot's image of the refusal of the Christian to bear witness in his time.

The impulse to withdraw in contempt or despair from a culture inimical to him is probably the Christian's deepest temptation. Perhaps it is the only answer for some. Thomas Merton found his center of gravity in a Cistercian monastery and from this still center he was able to bear witness. Is there another way for those of us who believe that Christ, the Word, came two thousand years ago? I trust so. Christ came, indeed, as Eliot's poem says "swaddled in darkness," and as an infant "unable to speak a word." As I believe this, I believe that the Word of God is being gradually illuminated, that this Word will never be completed until the end of time. I will listen for the nuances of that Word as it is being shaped, not only by the Church, but also in contemporary art.

Jeremiads may be all I'll hear. One of the most powerful voices in English poetry today is that of Ted Hughes. In his latest volume, *Crow*, he is concerned with survival as the only absolute verity man can know. Crow himself, the non-hero of the sequence of poems, is a grotesque cartoon figure, black of soul and black of heart. He is also a theologian. Hughes is ultimately a religious poet ceaselessly trying to define the nature of man and his relationship with God. In "Crow's Theology," the egomaniacal Crow realizes God loves him because "God spoke Crow."

> But what
> Loved the stones and spoke stone?
> They seemed to exist too.
> And what spoke that strange silence
> After his clamor of caws faded?
> And what loved the shot-pellets
> That dribbled from those strung-up mummifying crows?
> What spoke the silence of lead?

What Hughes touches in the darkness as he gropes to feel for the face of God and man is shocking. But, as one of my graduate students wrote, "Reading *Crow* is like being knocked from one's horse on the road to Damascus: there is a show of light, but more, it elicits change." Just so. Look at Hughes' images and your eyeballs are seared. You must learn to see again, a condition preliminary to conversion.

Perhaps Samuel Beckett's drama is even bleaker than Hughes' poetry. When I first read *Endgame* I wondered that such desperate material should be called a "play." But I was so stunned by an initial impact that Beckett's central metaphor escaped me. Blind Hamm and his servant, Clov, (the pun is incredible) are engaged in a game. They play life as if they were figures in a game of chess. The childhood fantasies of make-believe become the supreme necessities of existence. Hamm (let)'s world has indeed become a stage and he must play out his role until the show is over. Beckett's *Happy Days* also deals with human beings as actors trapped as they have been cast. Plump, fiftyish Winnie is imbedded up to her waist in a mound of earth. She is still able, in the first act, to rummage in her black bag for her sole possessions—toothbrush, paste, spectacles, a parasol, a handkerchief. The only other character in the play is her husband, Willie. He lives behind the mound, rarely responding to her, his hat and arm sometimes visible to the audience. Winnie steadfastly resists despair. She plays her role, even in the second act when only her head is above the mound, with as incredible

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an energy as Hamm plays his with style. Beckett's drama resists explication or reduction to theme. He stares relentlessly at the human condition and its radical limitations. Like Hughes he is concerned with man's survival but the key to Beckett is his care for the *way* man survives. Beckett celebrates performance. His characters have no past or future; they are caught in an interminable now. They are on stage, waiting for their cue, endlessly repeating their lines. But Beckett does not allow them to fall into the apathetic sleep of Gerontion. His characters move in a kind of frenetic alacrity in the service of the master puppeteer. They are great vaudeville performers.

Visual arts offer us no respite from that troubling vision of life so persistent as to be the very mote dancing in our eye. We are hard-pressed to find something pretty to hang over the piano. Pop Art is the bête noire to most of us. It is an affront to our taste and sensibility, the antithesis of fine art. But if it had its inception in an uncritical acceptance of the vulgar, with someone like Roy Lichtenstein Pop Art becomes an experimental formal statement as well as an ironic comment on our present society. Lichtenstein's technique and control of his material are superb. But Pop Art is not abstract. It stares with awful representational directness at its subject. Lichtenstein's comic strip figures isolate and heighten the banal in modern life. When the subject matter loses its immediacy, critics will be free to concentrate on his technique. For now, what he says about our culture is an indictment.

Contemporary art has few oases but I discovered one this summer at the White Mountain Arts Festival in Jefferson, New Hampshire. On the lawn of an old inn with Mount Washington as spectacular backdrop, a group of artists had assembled one of the largest outdoor exhibits of sculpture in the country. The resident sculptors also held classes and their students welded metal, chipped away at elm, pine, or granite. One of the organizers of the exhibit said that the artists hoped many

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of these works would be "climbed upon by children." And this was exactly what was happening. Little boys challenged each other to jump from the heights of a marble mound, day-dreamed in the curve of a granite slab. One small girl hugged a huge clown emerging, as the sculptor chipped, from the stump of an elm. No one complained about what it all meant. The material of the countryside and mountains of New Hampshire were being celebrated before their eyes. With the sculptors, the people wandering on the lawn saw how beautiful these forms were that were being released from stone, metal, wood. They touched the textures and found them a delight. It was like the first day of the world.

But such experiences are rare. Wherever we turn in modern literature and painting, we find little consolation and much ugliness. Perhaps if we look steadily enough at this emerging face of contemporary man we can learn to love and compassionate his image and hear the Word spoken in time. In Iris Murdoch's *Bruno's Dream*, the Bruno of the title is a dying old man. He is peevish and repulsive in the form his illness has taken. Yet, in his service, the other characters in the novel recover their human capacity for affection and devotion. He is not restored to health but they are. Concerned Christians need not participate in the illness of modern man as artists depict him, but in care for such suffering those same Christians may be cured from their own kind of not necessarily less virulent sickness.

It would be superficial of me to think that I have answered those initial questions of the relation between faith and culture. But faith has never been able to demand total answers. What I have done is to assert, not logically but analogically, my trust that good art offers us, in Maritain's words, "a supra-rational intuition of the latent perfection of things." I have maintained that in much of the fine literature, painting and sculpture of the modern world we can discern the features of a contemporary person who is both human and Divine. It would be faith's greatest betrayal to turn away in fear claiming, "I do not know the man."

BOOKS

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LONELINESS & SELF-INDULGENCE

GEORGE W. SHEA

CONFESSIONS, *by Saint Augustine of Hippo, Fourth Century.* In the Latin of Cicero and Livy, *confessio* signifies much the same thing as our English word "confession"; it is an admission, generally of guilt or ignorance or error. In the Latin of the Vulgate *confessio* also comes to mean a profession of belief in Christ. Thus Paul in his Epistle to the Romans says: "Si confitearis in ore tuo Dominum Iesum . . . salvus eris": "if with your lips you profess your belief in the Lord Jesus . . . you will be saved."

In the *Confessions* of St. Augustine the two meanings of the word coalesce. The work is indeed a catalogue of the saint's errors and sins; but it is also a profession of his faith. This is not an empty playing on words; it is rather a reflection of Augustine's view of man and his relationship to God. For Augustine, God brings man to Himself through his blindness and folly. Indeed all human activity serves this purpose only: to bring man to God. Quite logically then, for the convert, a confession of his earlier sins will be a profession of faith as well.

It is this simplicity of belief and unity of vision that one finds at first attractive in rereading the *Confessions.* Here is an elegant statement of the Christian and Platonic solution for the

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problem of the one and the many, creator and creation. It embraces everything, can be grasped by all, is both simple and beautiful. How strikingly different from our own fragmented vision and from the shifting culture of twentieth-century man, which lacks a unifying cosmology, an all-embracing life-pattern either religious or secular.

And yet, somehow, one is a little bored with the *Confessions*. The artistic sensibilities of our age surely have much to do with this. You cannot help thinking that a twentieth-century saint would have made all those sins of the flesh just a little more palpable; and, if he did not, to avoid scandal, would he not, at least, have given us some real people instead of the abstract and forbidding mother and friends of the *Confessions?*

As one reads on, one realizes that it is not a matter of literary sensibilities alone; for the whole social context is somehow missing. Apart from a brief and despairing appearance by one of the civil servants and imperial lackeys known as *agentes in rebus*, the political, social, and economic turmoil of the age is virtually absent. When one adds to this the condemnation of philosophy, empirical science, art, theater and music, one's boredom begins to be tinged with anxiety.

What is more, to those who have not achieved mystic union with the divinity, there is something terribly lonely about Augustine's final state. There is loneliness and also a flavor of self-indulgence and inwardness that characterizes some bizarre forms of psychoanalysis in our own age; although one must admit that the emphasis in Augustine is on God rather than self alone.

In the end, for those of us over thirty, who grew up in the twilight of the belief in social progress, that one belief common to both Marxist and capitalist, Augustine's prescription for salvation and especially the notion that human activity is significant only to the extent that it brings the individual human being to God, must seem somehow alien. Although the experience of the twentieth century cannot but raise doubts about the progress of our race; although a failure of nerve may drive many to a mystic escape; although even those who labor for social justice labor in an increasingly pessimistic context; still the question of the relation of secular to divine destiny must exercise our minds. Surely the investigation and reshaping of the material universe through science and art is beyond the point of being written off and abandoned by man; and the relation of these tasks to man's divine destiny ought to be more complex and significant than Augustine supposed. There need not be heresy here; it is not necessarily a question of mankind perfecting itself without God, but of becoming, perhaps, more perfect with God.

In spite of these misgivings and disappointments, it is still easy to recommend the *Confessions* to modern readers, to the young who are attracted to other forms of religious conscious-

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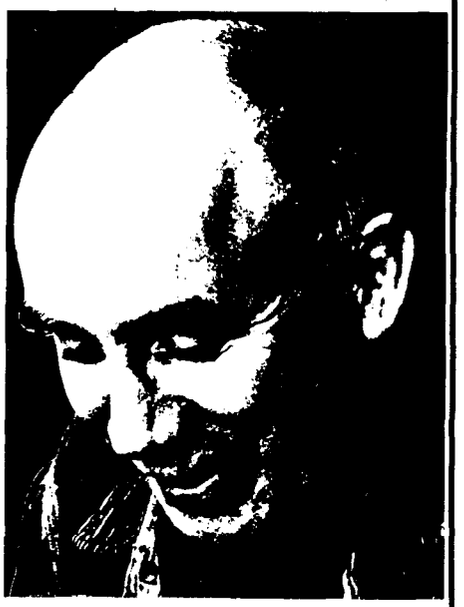

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ness, that they may see the beauties of the Western Christian tradition; to those who require an antidote to the many-minded turmoil of modern intellectual life; and perhaps as a negative medieval example to those who are despairing of the secular and of progress in our own time.

In our age of catastrophes and rapid change one must be cautious in questioning the appropriateness of the eschatological chasm which Augustine placed between the two cities. There *is* much cause for pessimism. This I know, however, that rereading the *Confessions* made me yearn for other authors (and this is perhaps the best way to criticize a book): for Dante who loved the beauty in both the secular and the divine, for Teilhard de Chardin, although it is increasingly fashionable to condemn him as a dreamer; for the English authors who delighted in Hopkins' "dappled things": Pepys in his *Diary*, Maugham in his modest but marvelous short stories; and, for reassurance that history moves forward, however slowly and faultingly, George Trevelyan in his *English Social History*.

FAITH AND REASON

VERNON J. BOURKE

SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, *by St. Thomas Aquinas, Thirteenth Century.* Last April several Italian tour-bus drivers vigorously objected to leaving the fine autostrada from Rome to Naples to take their passengers to such odd places as Fossanova, Monte Cassino, Aquino and that most desolate of hills, Roccasecca. Their antipathy was understandable. What made these places interesting to these crazy tourists? The drivers did not understand that fifteen hundred scholars from all over the world wanted to see the localities made famous by Thomas of Aquino. Seven centuries after his death this Italian professor of theology is still the focus of widespread attention from learned men of every religious persuasion. His *Sum-*

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ma of Theology in the huge McGraw-Hlil, 60-volume, bilingual edition, under the direction of the British Dominicans, is but one indication of this interest. This *Summa* presents St. Thomas' views on God, man and the world in one of the greatest products of Christian literature. What was started as a compendium for beginners ended as a very complete exposition of Catholic doctrine.

Aquinas felt that thirteenth-century theological writings had become disorganized as a result of slavish adherence to the structure of Patristic treatises and the procedures of the classroom. So he planned his Summa not as a textbook but as an orderly treatise in three "Parts": I, on God as Creator and the procession of creatures from Him; II, on man's moral life and his return to God; and III, on Christ and the means of salvation. The style of this *Summa* is not that of syllogisms and theses, so dear to Renaissance scholasticism. Thomas asks questions (Is theology really scientific thinking? Is man's soul a bodily thing? What is eternal law? Was the Incarnation the only way that God could have saved mankind?) and he answers them. At first approach this question-style may put off the modern reader; but one soon comes to appreciate the open spirit of enquiry that marks Thomas' patient asking, listing difficulties, stating standard texts or arguments contrary to these difficulties, and then responding to the main query and objections as best he can. All the resources of learning available to him are mustered here: ancient and medieval natural science (now mostly outmoded), the views of historians and classical writers, the laws of civil and ecclesiastical society, the writings of the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church, the books of more recent theologians and philosophers, the classics of Judaism and Islam—and above all the Sacred Scriptures.

Many readers are astonished to see Augustine and Aristotle cited with almost equal frequency on almost every page of the *Summa*. What is not evident at first glance is the solid biblical foundation for the whole work. In a recent study of reason and revelation in the *Summa*, the Swedish theologian Per Erik Persson left no doubt about this: "Thomas holds that there is a close connection between scripture and theology. The scriptures teach of the supernatural truth which is essential for salvation . . . Thomas sees his own task as theologian to be that of interpreting and communicating to his own age the substance of this teaching." This is so: there is rational argument and philosophy in the *Summa* but the basic message is from the Bible.

Various commentators see diverse central themes in this great work: the outgoing and return to God of all creation, the process of sacred history, the interplay of faith and reason. But the Prologue to Part III (written near the end of Thomas' life) shows the Christocentric quality of the whole treatise: "Since our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, showed us the way of truth in His very self," writes Aquinas,

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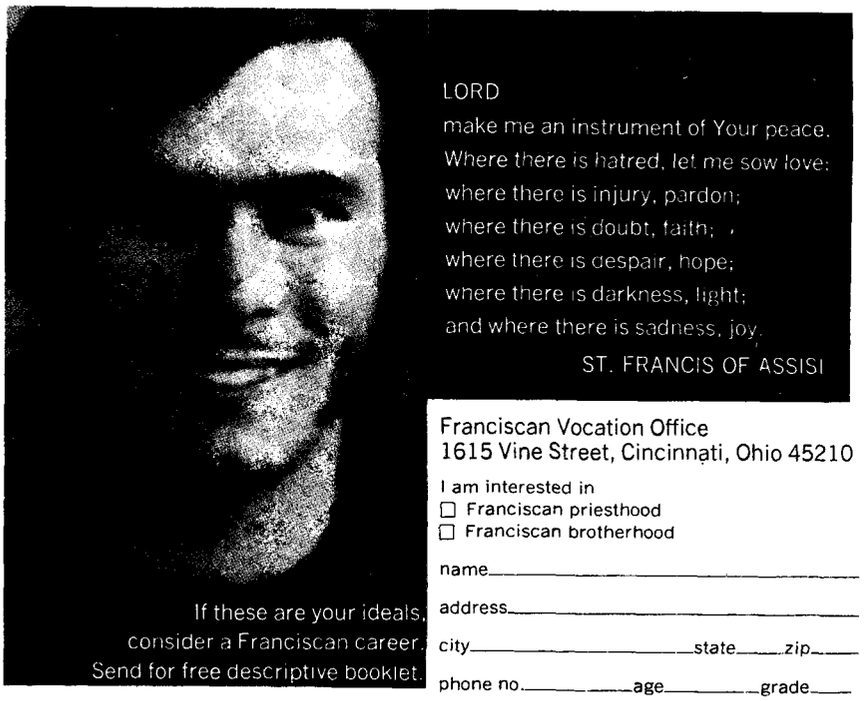
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we must crown our *Summa* with "a consideration of the Saviour of all and of the benefits that He brings to the human race." Few scholars know this last Part well; it was not printed in Anton Pegis' *Basic Writings of St. Thomas* which did so much to advance the knowledge of Thomism in the English-reading world.

This *Summa* opened Christian learning to all forms of wisdom; it influenced both sides in the Reformation; it anticipated the Renaissance stress on the dignity of man; it was the center of the revival of Thomistic studies begun a century ago. Of course the *Summa* was written in the context of medieval culture and learning. It cannot provide ready-made answers to all our religious and moral problems today. But much of St. Thomas' argument remains fresh and invigorating; as an innovator himself, he would be the first to recommend that we rethink Christian wisdom in every new century.

MAN FOR OUR TIME?

MICHAEL NOVAK

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST, *by Thomas à Kempis, Fifteenth Century.* Almost exactly five centuries ago, in 1471, the Flemish author of *The Imitation of Christ,* in the ninetieth year of his age, went to the Lord. According to an edition of 1941, he is said to have been "of small stature, well-proportioned, and to have had a piercing eye." He gave classic expression to Catholicism in his time.

Can he have been wrong? What are we to learn from him?

At random, as though opening the *I Ching,* I read:

"Sometimes we are moved by passion, and think it zeal.

"We blame little things in others, and overlook great things in ourselves.

"We are quick enough in perceiving and weighing what we bear from others; but we think little of what others have to bear from us." (II.S.1.).

* * *

"If thou set thyself to what thou

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oughtest, that is, to suffer and to die, it will quickly be better with thee, and thou shalt find peace." (II.12.12).

* * *

"It is vain and useless to conceive either grief or joy for future things, which perhaps shall never come to pass." (III.30.2).

We were taught, years ago, to "be careful" of this little book, "not to take it too seriously." It was fashionable in liberal Catholic circles—Thomas O'Dea cites it in *An American Catholic Dilemma*—to flay the famous text about the importance of feeling compassion rather than defining it.

In 1952, when I was nineteeen, I wrote in my copy of the *Imitation* that it contained everything necessary for becoming a saint; "and yet the hardest problems it leaves unanswered." Its relations to human society, to study, to activity, to affluence, and to entertainment troubled me then (according to my notes).

Now that I am forty-one, my reflections take another tack. In 1952, it seemed good to break out from the monastic pattern, to enter into "the modern world." In 1974, it seems that the abnegation, the obedience, the insight that progress and the future are illusions, and the stress on suffering and death in à Kempis are invitations to break out from the contemporary pattern.

No illusions have a stronger grip upon our minds than those of the age in which we live—and not those of the common people, nor of the conventional wisdom, but those precisely of the most enlightened and intellectual critics of the decade. It is these, which, because more rare and more heroic, most commend themselves to seekers after truth; and those, as well, which—being most salient—later seem to date.

Thus, those who long to represent Catholicism at its best today, must, it seems, undergo two painful tests. We must test ourselves against the Catholicism of our forebears, like à Kempis. We tend to disdain them. But did they see reality more unflinchingly than we?

Secondly, we must, like them, diagnose the exact "spirit of our age"—and detach ourselves from it. We are not saved by progressive notions, nor by patriotic notions. We are not saved by ethnicity, nor by liberation, nor by radical witness, nor by any of the other "options" we so tightly cherish.

"Run hither or thither, thou wilt find no rest but in humble subjection under the government of a superior.

"A fancy for places and changing of residence has deluded many.

"It is true, everyone is desirous of acting according to his own way of thinking, and is most inclined to such as agree with him in opinion. . .

"Who is so wise, as to be able fully to know all things?" (I.9.1-2).

These are not words to flatter us. Many of these words are hard. Many sentences in this book clash against everything our present civilization teaches us. Is that their purpose? They were also hard in the fifteenth century.

Our brothers and sisters down the ages are our judges—not as the Lord is—but rather more centrally than are the

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SPIRITUAL EXERCISES, *by Saint Ignatius Loyola, Sixteenth Century.* Behind each Jesuit is a book. Not a book to be read in one sitting; it is rather an outline and guideline for a 30-day prayer experience based on the mystical prayer of Ignatius himself in the cave at Manresa. (Known as the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius,* this book is available today in several English translations; I prefer Louis Phul's, available in inexpensive paperback from the Loyola University Press in Chicago.)

Ignatius wanted his men to be "contemplatives in action." They were to carry the book with them, not as a physical appendage to sandals and staff, but as a spiritual vision, a habit of mind reinforcing their service commitment to the Kingdom of Christ.

This book encapsulates a spirituality of choice. In the words of their author, the *Spiritual Exercises* "have as their purpose the conquest of self and the regulation of one's life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment." Since decision-making ends only at the grave, and since conflicting motives and competing "spirits" (1 Jn., 4:1) converge at many of the decision points in the life of the believer, the utility of Ignatian spirituality extends into daily life far beyond the retreat experience. The person who has made the *Exercises* has learned a useful approach to the discovery of God's will in the midst of ambiguity. This is called discernment of spirits—an Ignatian approach to reality outlined in the book, initiated in the guided retreat, and integrated into the very identity of the person formed by the *Exercises.*

It comes as a surprise to those who associate intellect and logical reasoning with the word "Jesuit," to learn that the great Ignatian insight was a recognition that God frequently and routinely communicates himself to us *through our feelings.* Ignatius emphasized rigorous intellectual development as preparation for any apostolate. And he assigned highest priority to intellectual apostolates for his men-at-work, once they were trained. But he insisted that his men-at-prayer be in touch with their feelings. Did they feel "consolation" or "desolation" as they contemplated this or that event in the life of Christ? What emotion drew them toward or repelled them from a particular choice in the presence of the Lord? What was the source of that particular feeling—God, self, or the "evil spirit," the "deadly enemy of our human nature?" If no emotion at all is felt, something may be wrong. And if this happens in the context of the retreat, it is to be discussesd with the director. Tell him how you feel, not simply what you are thinking. The director, according to the Georgetown theologian Thomas King, a contemporary expert on the subject, should go after the "spark." He should look for what it is in those meditations on the life of Christ that registers with the emotions. He should also be alert to the presence of a spark that causes the retreatant to recoil.

This will sound strange to many who boast that they "can always tell" a Jesuit, but who know nothing of this book. It will contradict the classroom experience of students in Jesuit schools who attempted to answer a question with the hesitant opening, "I feel that . . .," only to be met with, "Never mind how you feel, I want to know what you think!"

Well, there is a new Jesuit around. Better, perhaps, to say renewed Jesuit, because it is still the same old book. That book is opened more and studied more carefully now than ever before. And the Jesuit mind has opened and deepened in the contemporary renewal.

Some seasoned Jesuits have left the Order on the basis of decisions made the Ignatian way. Some have left without ever really knowing the book. Some

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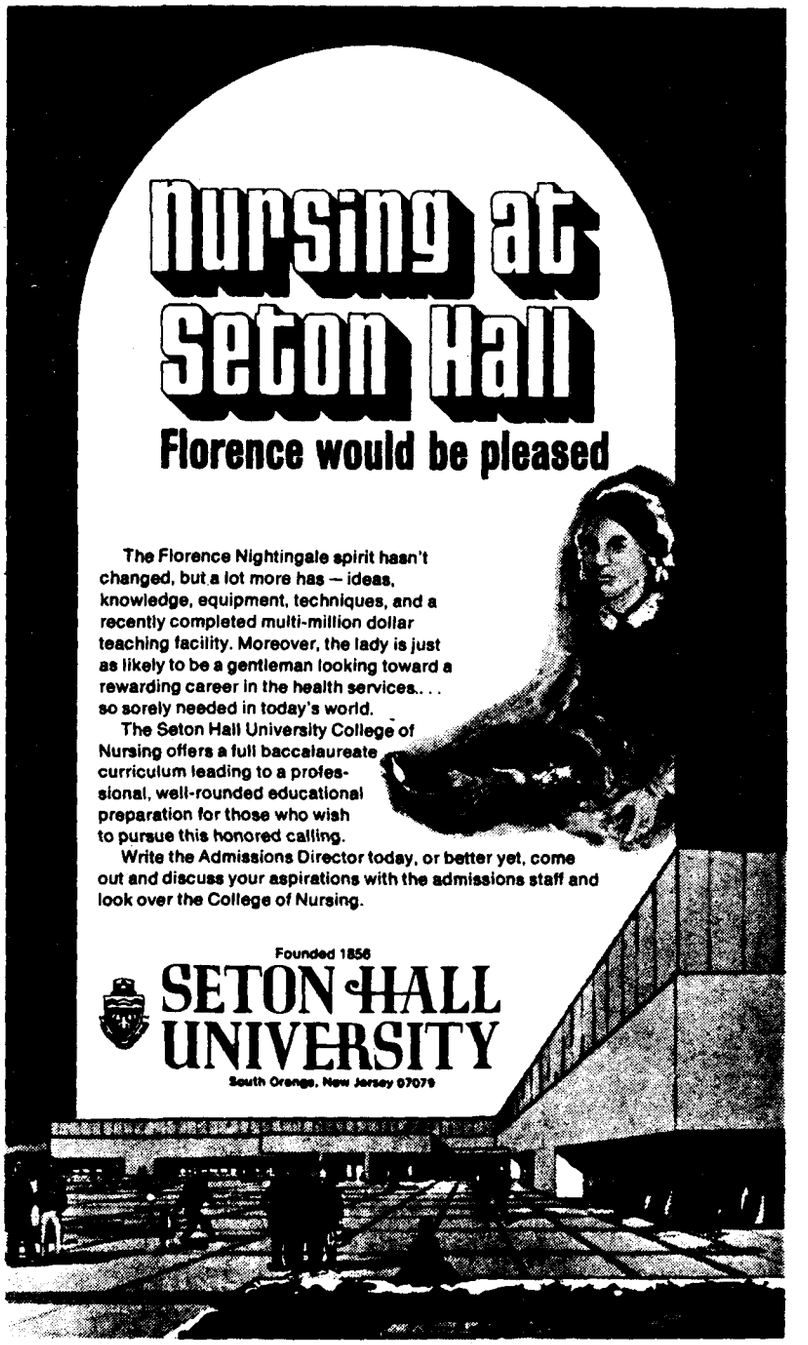
who remain are, it must be admitted, untouched, unassisted and untroubled by the little classic upon which their Society rests. Many more are carrying the vision of the *Spiritual Exercises* forward. Their commitments are firm; their apostolate manifold. Fewer newcomers are drawn to their ranks today. This reduction in numbers will mean the withdrawal from some apostolates. On the positive side, it is likely to mean an extension of the experience of the *Exercises* to more laymen in personally guided retreats—one-on-one, by the book. And this is as it should be. As Ignatius once remarked: "If I were giving the *Exercises* in their entirety, I should give them to very few, and they educated, or persons who are very desirous of perfection, or very prominent, or who might be thinking of entering the Society." The point is not to search out the "best and the brightest" in order to establish an isolated, exclusionary elite. He wanted to reach them, but only if they were interested in others. Nor would Ignatius, if he were around today, fail to recognize that there are genuine elites among the poor and powerless. He would surely want his book to reach these emerging leaders. In any case, he advised, with respect to inviting persons to make the *Exercises*, that "one should determine precisely to find subjects capable and suitable for helping others after they themselves have been helped." To the extent that contemporary Jesuits heed this advice, their book will remain alive and well, and living in the hearts of a small but influential band of believers.

IN THE DARK WOOD

RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS

THE PHENOMENON OF MAN, *by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Twentieth Century.* The body is buried at the Jesuit novitiate up at St. Andrew-on-Hudson. The soul does not so much march on as it just hangs around insinuating itself into the overcast of consciousness that is, for better and for worse, our moment in the noosphere. Let him go on long enough, and the somewhat confused proponent of any idea mildly unconventional will allow as how his proposal is "Teilhardian." The good father, whose masterwork was unquestionably *The Phenomenon of Man,* seems fated to having his name taken in vain. By high school students who, seized by his vision of the unifying thrust of the universe, confuse him with Herman Hesse's mindless absorption of the Many into the One, ignoring Teilhard's insistence upon complexification. By the ecological acolytes of Mother Nature who celebrate his emphasis upon the interdependence of all things, forgetting Teilhard's conviction about the "centricity" of the human enterprise. By Pop Marxists who count him among the elect for his recognition of the collectivizing force of history, but are embarrassed by (if they are aware of) Teilhard's notion of "an irreversibly personalizing universe." And by ethnocentric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consciousness-raisers who would displace the missionaries with their own mission to the world's unenlightened, uninhibited as they are by Teilhard's modesty about our temporal limitations in "building the earth." His biographer, Robert Speaight, has written, "Between the smoke raised by his critics and the smoke raised by his thurifers his true stature tends to be obscured."

Whether Teilhard can survive his enemies and his disciples, I have not the slightest idea. The disciples seem to be a hardier lot. Perhaps the enemies have dropped away out of boredom. In any case, like Thomists of old, the thousand or more Teilhard societies and publications seem more given to veneration than to advance. The task is to prove that there is nothing that cannot be illuminated by "viewing it from a Teilhardian perspective." Almost ten years after his death, there is little that has not been claimed for his cause or attributed to his omniprescience. His more fervid devotees are inclined more to amalgamating than to analysis. No doubt Teilhard is partially responsible. The ambiguity of his models has provided many with a license for conceptual miscegenation, and they have made the most of it. Models that some call breathtakingly comprehensive others view as uselessly indiscriminate. In the whorehouse of current ideas, his avowed disciples frequently behave like drunken peasants with credit cards.

Yet, for many of us who fifteen years ago were beginning to think in an intellectually self-conscious way, *The Phenomenon of Man* transformed the conceptual horizons. And perhaps for our century which, to paraphrase Dante, in the middle of the journey of its life came to itself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost, *The Phenomenon of Man* is at least a blaze mark. I do not know what it will say to people a hundred or three hundred years from now, if indeed it will be read. Teilhardianism is more a disposition than a position. It is not a system to be elaborated but a mood to be experienced. It may be the disposition and the mood were peculiarly attuned to the beginning of the sixties when windows long shut were thrown open and brilliance long suppressed was liberated and the world was new, and we were very young. I would wish for the next century and the next their own Teilhardian moments in which they bring to light of day the brilliance they too will surely have suppressed.

As for us, Teilhard has left not a program but an agenda. There are at least five major items on the agenda. First, against the perduring positivism in our culture, to assert a more expan-

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sive role for reason, to make room for metaphysics in rational discourse, to challenge the cramped and fetid secularism to which too much Christian thought has also succumbed. It is a big job, involving the correction and further development of almost three centuries of what has been meant by modern, scientific, secular thought. Others who attempt it will, like Teilhard, be dismissed as "rationalists" by the theologians and as "mystics" by the scientists. Until one day, it is to be hoped, we recognize how artificial, false and restrictive these categories have been.

The second item (and here I follow the argument of Philip Hefner's excellent little book, *The Promise of Teilhard*) is the revival of a "Christian humanism" that sacrifices neither humanness nor Christian identity. "What we need," Teilhard wrote, "is men who are all the more convinced of the sacred value of human effort in that they are primarily interested in God." We will still need that two hundred years from now.

The third and related item is the courage to do theology "from below" (as Wolfhart Pannenberg says) rather than "from above" (as Karl Barth and many others imply is possible and nec-

(Continued on page 175)

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essary). "If," Teilhard wrote in 1934, "I were successively to lose my faith in Christ, my faith in a personal God, my faith in the Spirit, I think I would still continue to believe in the World." This is to take history and our time within it with religious seriousness, to decline all illusory escapes from our creatureliness.

The fourth item is the quest for vindication. The great issue, Teilhard insisted, is whether it is better to be than not to be, whether existence is absurd. Against optimistic liberal progressivism and against the heroic despair of existentialism, Teilhard posited the cross-shaped path toward the Omega Point. In distinction from Teilhard, I believe the Christian hope is not so much a matter of evolutionary planning as of divine promise, not so much the past unfolding as the future arriving. But in common with Teilhard, we speak of redemption under the rubric of hope. Reality is, to use the phrase of the late Abraham Joshua Heschel, "the divine pathos." Hope's response to the prospect of ultimate absurdity *still* awaits vindication.

Finally, the example of Teilhard gives us the daring to ask the seemingly unanswerable questions, in the knowledge that they are, after all, the only questions worth asking. For example, a 1945 essay, "Life and the Planets: What Is Happening at This Moment on Earth?" The whole person does not despise the quotidian, but neither can he be content within the creeping intelligence of a still infantile world. Is such thought demonstrably productive? That is a bookkeeper's question. The worth of some things cannot be tabulated: sharing in the eucharist by virtues developed, sexual love by babies produced, listening to the Mass in B-minor by musicological knowledge gained, asking questions by answers reached.

Yes, two hundred years from now people should consider *The Phenomenon of Man* required reading—in order to understand our moment in the dark wood, certainly; in order to anticipate their future which is also ours, let us hope.

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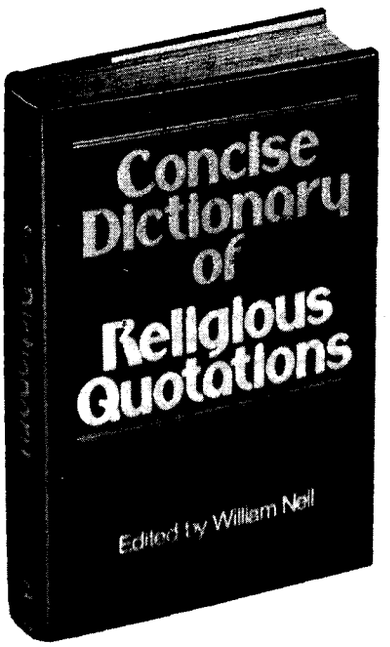

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Commonweal
(Raymond A. Schroth, S.J.)

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